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# Finding Gold in Green

In Bedford, NY, a historic home discovers new life in going eco-friendly

By Alice Liao

When a flood left their Bedford, NY, home infested with a stubborn case of toxic black mold, environmentalist and professor of environmental litigation at Pace University Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and his family decided it was time to rebuild. Their new home would be green, of course, as well as LEED Gold certified, and to this end, the Kennedys assembled a "green dream team" consisting of Blansfield Builders; PMC Architects; LEED architects Patrick Croke, Brooks Washburn and Allan Shope; LEED consultant Steven Winter Associates; and interior designer Robin Wilson. Their combined efforts and expertise resulted in an 8,700-sq.-ft. living laboratory showcasing the latest in eco-friendly technologies and products.

The decision to rebuild, however, did not come lightly. According to Wilson, for two years the Kennedys tried unsuccessfully to remove the black mold bloom with non-toxic options and by employing industrial-style dehumidifiers. Only after watching their children fall sick at home and recover when away did they realize that the fungus had become more than just a surface problem. It was flourishing in their walls, had leached onto their belongings and had spread from the basement to the second-floor sleeping quarters.

The rebuilding itself was also not without its complications. In fact, because of limitations imposed by local building codes, to preserve the home's existing footprint required that part of the work be done with the entire house supported on hydraulic stilts, Wilson said, adding, "I called it the leaning tower of Pisa after a windstorm." Further applying pressure to the project was its no-nonsense schedule, which took the home from its groundbreaking to completion in a short 14 months.

But none of that is evident in the warm, inviting interiors that Wilson has created for the home. "So many people hear 'eco-friendly design' and think bland and blander," she said. "This project can show them that you can have quite beautiful things and yet do eco-friendly design." As with all of her projects, Wilson applied to the Kennedy home her firm's four principles of green design—sustainable, recyclable, reusable and non-toxic. All four are also at work in the roughly 400-sq.-ft. kitchen, where she enlisted the help of Barbara Piazza, of Euphoria Kitchens. "As a designer, I can design a concept," Wilson noted, "but a kitchen designer is key to a successful concept."

Together, their charge was to create a kitchen that would serve as "the hearth of the home" while keeping pace with all the demands of a high-profile family. As such, the space riffs on the conventional work triangle to provide convenience for everyday usage and to maximize workflow when the family entertains. Instead of one refrigeration unit, for example, there are two—one a refrigerator and the other a freezer—which bookend a cooking station comprised of a range, with plenty of landing space on each side, and



*At more than 400 sq. ft., the Kennedys' kitchen is spacious and comfortable, yet its roles are many. To accommodate the family's everyday and entertaining needs, an oversized 16-ft. x 7-ft. island (above & right) is centrally located and houses a bevy of amenities, including storage, a handful of appliances and a recycling center (far right). The massive unit also helps separate the cooking area from the rest of the kitchen, keeping the chef—and cooking—out of harm's way. Along the perimeter of the room, white frameless cabinets (top right), made with no added urea formaldehyde, offer plenty of storage while counting toward LEED certification. Dark bamboo flooring offsets the cabinetry, as does the black countertop, which is formed of recycled material.*

a hood. According to Wilson, having two separate units ensures ample cold storage and saves energy, while moving them to each end of the cooking area allows chilled items to be retrieved without interfering with the chef.

The third component of the triangle, the main sink is situated opposite the range on a massive, 16-ft. x 7-ft. island. Though dramatic in presence, the island is no mere showpiece, but a true workhorse that is packed with features to help take the family from morning to night and from daily routine to large formal functions. Housed in one side and within easy reach of the cooking area are dual dishwashers, a warming drawer and a speedcook oven, while anchoring the ends are a bar sink and a three-drawer recycling center. The island also includes storage and seating, as well as an expansive countertop that easily transitions from a casual breakfast buffet—ideal for this family of eight, plus a houseguest or two—to a serious work surface for professional prepping, plating and serving food.

Formed of post-consumer recycled materials bound by corn-oil resin, the countertop material, said Wilson, will count toward LEED certification, as will the white



frameless cabinets that line the perimeter of the space and were made with no added urea formaldehyde. The cabinetry is part of Wilson's signature line, which is made by a company whose earth-friendly ways encompass not only the manufacture of its products but also the disposal of its scraps. These, noted Wilson, are turned into everything from fire-starter pellets to cutting boards to gerbil and hamster bedding.

Other point-earning elements in the kitchen include Energy Star ratings on many of the appliances, dimmable LED downlights, low-flow faucets, bamboo flooring—specified in a caramelized finish to offset the white cabinetry—and a soft-green no-VOC paint chosen for the walls. And what of "reuse," one of Wilson's four principles? At her suggestion, friends of the Kennedys presented them with an old pew that was reclaimed from an 80-year-old Quaker church. It now sits at one end of the kitchen and seems a natural fit with the overall look of cozy luxury.

In fact, despite its size, as well as the many functions it is designed to support, the kitchen effuses a simple elegance and ease that belie its sustainable character and its toxic past. Eco-friendly can be beautiful, noted Wilson, and with more companies going green, "you should definitely make the effort." ■



#### SOURCES

**Designer:** Robin Wilson—Robin Wilson Home, New York; [www.robinwilsonhome.com](http://www.robinwilsonhome.com) **Architect:** PMC Architects  
**LEED Architects:** Patrick Croke, Brooks Washburn and Allan Shope **Builder:** Blansfield Builders **LEED Consultant:** Steven Winter Associates **Manufacturers:** Cabinetry: Holiday Kitchens; Countertops: ECO by Cosentino; Countertop fabricator: Amendola Marble and Stone Center; Appliances: Electrolux; Sinks and faucets: Kohler; Flooring: Dragonfly Bamboo; Lighting: Juno Lighting (LED downlights), Ozium (LED cabinet lighting) Ikea (pendants); Accessories: The Nest Store; Paint: Benjamin Moore **Photography:** © Vanessa Lenz

For more information on the Kennedy Green House, visit [www.kennedygreenhouse.com](http://www.kennedygreenhouse.com).