

# Los Angeles Times Magazine

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HOME DESIGN ISSUE

## Green From the Ground Up

From front lawns to rooftops, environmentally sound design has evolved from the merely fashionable to a committed lifestyle

- > Architectural eco chic
- > Building green dreams
- > Bamboo-zled
- > Sol survivors





## living lightly

Careful siting, environmentally friendly materials and a drought-tolerant garden are the hallmarks of a 21st century house in Santa Monica

BY BARBARA THORNBURG | PHOTOGRAPHED BY TIM STREET-PORTER



WHAT: HARDIPLANK FIBER CEMENT SIDING  
IN LIEU OF: WOOD SIDING  
WHY: ASBESTOS-FREE, NON-COMBUSTIBLE AND NEEDS LITTLE MAINTENANCE  
CONTACT: [WWW.JAMESHARDIE.COM](http://WWW.JAMESHARDIE.COM), (888) 542-7343



Clockwise from left: A pair of skylights in the stairwell draw and release hot air to passively cool Craig Ehrlich and Christine Loh's house. Low-maintenance concrete was used for the floor. Michael Schneider of Orange Street Studio used dymondia and blue fescue grass in designing the drought-resistant garden.

**F**orget the hippie '70s version of "green"—unattractive straw-bale and rammed-earth homes, black solar roof panels and toilets that didn't flush. Today's sustainable homes are less hippie, more hip.

Take the sleek 21st century Case Study home of American entrepreneur Craig Ehrlich and ex-Hong Kong politician-turned-think-tank founder Christine Loh. Although Hong Kong is the couple's primary residence, they wanted to establish a base in California, where Ehrlich grew up. An attractive, sustainably designed home and garden topped their list of priorities.

The last thing Ehrlich and Loh wanted was another Westside McMansion. They told their Los Angeles architects, John Friedman and his partner and wife Alice Kimm, to include all the comforts of home, but no air conditioning. They wanted a garden that was grass-free and irrigated with gray water. Low-flow toilets and radiant-heat floors were called for. "We both wanted to make sure to use the right kind of materials that . . . would be less environmentally heavy on the earth," explains Loh, whose Hong Kong organization, Civic Exchange, deals with sustainability and the environment.

The architects focused on siting the new two-story, 3,400-square-foot





hot air from the house," Friedman explains.

The rear and side of the home are enclosed by floor-to-ceiling, multitrack glass doors that seamlessly open to integrate the garden with the interior. The open-plan first floor features a kitchen, dining and living room, with a small office and bath tucked away by the entry. A large koi pond wraps around the corner of the living room: dragonflies occasionally flit in, cruise the length of the room and exit by the kitchen, Ehrlich says.

"Having a lovely garden was very important to us," says the expat, who has lived for nearly 20 years in a two-bedroom flat with no garden in Hong Kong's Mid-Levels neighborhood. "In Hong Kong, no one but the very elite mega-rich have private gardens." The Asian-inspired garden, presided over by two terra-cotta Xian warriors, is both lovely to look at and drought-tolerant. Instead of a water-guzzling lawn, the frontyard is planted in dymondia and blue fescue grass ground covers irrigated with gray water. Collected from bathroom sinks, bathtubs, showers and the washing machine, the water is filtered and held in an underground tank until needed.

Environmentally friendly cement board and stucco



WHAT: EARTH WEAVE NATURAL-FIBER CARPET  
IN LIEU OF: SYNTHETIC CARPET

WHY: BIODEGRADABLE; MADE WITH 100% NATURAL RAW MATERIALS  
CONTACT: [WWW.EARTHWEAVE.COM](http://WWW.EARTHWEAVE.COM), (706) 278-8200



Clockwise from left: Ocean breezes are drawn into the house, cooled by a large koi pond. Recessed shades and an exterior wood partition add privacy to the glass-enclosed shower. The tub surround is made from sustainably harvested jatoba wood. In the master bedroom, glass doors slide onto the outside wall to give an uninterrupted view of the garden. A low, stationary piece of glass acts as a guard rail.



A skylight above the central island draws in early-morning light to the east-facing kitchen, which features medium-density fiberboard cabinets painted with nontoxic paints. Craig Ehrlich and 4-month-old Leah.



were used to clad the modern exterior, which was covered with a nontoxic paint. Inside, low-maintenance concrete was used for the first floor, while sustainably harvested jatoba, a.k.a. Brazilian cherry, and mangaris accent doors, upstairs floors and a bathtub.

Photovoltaic solar panels on the roof supply 90% of the home's electricity. A net meter connected to the Santa Monica power grid often runs backward when the couple are abroad, ensuring what must be one of the lowest electricity bills on the Westside—about \$50 a month. An efficient gas water heater in the garage warms the radiant-heat concrete floors, but Ehrlich swears it's been on fewer than a dozen times in the last 18 months.

In the kitchen, medium-density fiberboard cabinets, made without formaldehyde, are covered with low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint; the countertops and splash are capped in CaesarStone. There's an energy-efficient Bosch dishwasher too. Still, some appliances were chosen with aesthetics in mind rather than efficiency, including a large Sub-Zero refrigerator and a Viking double oven with six burners and a grill. "I would be the first to admit that this is not a 100% green home," says Friedman, who considers himself a sustainable architect. "It is not necessary to sacrifice beauty for sustainability—one can always have both." <

*Barbara Thornburg is a senior Style editor at the magazine.*



WHAT: KIREI SORGHUM BOARD  
IN LIEU OF: WOOD PANEL BOARDS  
WHY: SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE, FORMALDEHYDE-FREE  
CONTACT: WWW.KIREIUSA.COM, (619) 236-9924