

# Living Green in Greenville

When empty nesters Carlton and Brenda Owen decided to build a new home, they turned Green with the Upstate House.

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If you're not careful, it's easy to drive past the home of the future.

At first glance, the unassuming Mission bungalow-style house perched on a hill above Greenville's Cleveland Park looks like many other homes in the neighborhood. It isn't topped with a geodesic dome—and instead of a helipad, its walkway leads to a wide porch and a welcoming front door.

Step inside, however, and you enter the future—at least an energy-saving vision of the years to come. "Welcome to the Upstate House," Carlton Owen says. "Let me show you around the place that's bringing the idea of building Green to South Carolina."

## Less Use, More Reuse

Working with the Upstate Forever organization, Carlton and his wife, Brenda, along with state and local governments, architects, product manufacturers, and builders across the South, created a 2,500-square-foot energy-efficient home (plus a full unfinished basement and two-car garage) that saves money and materials.

Futuristic features such as a solar-powered water heater, compact fluorescent lights, and soy-based foam insulation mingle with floors made from old wooden pallets and walkways and retaining walls built from salvaged stone.

"The whole project cost us around \$400,000, just a little more than building a normal house. You don't have to do a bunch of expensive, high-tech things to save energy and be environmentally friendly," Carlton says, leading a tour through the comfortable living room. "Take this wood-burning stove from Norway. It's one of the most efficient in the world, and it still heats most of the upstairs area. The rest of the heating and cooling system is electric—but our utility bill runs only about \$50 a month."

Energy-saving ideas fill the home's yard as well as its rooms. Located on the edge of Greenville's largest city park and a few blocks from Carlton's downtown office, the Upstate House's site offers a perfect combination of urban benefits and natural beauty.

"This was an abandoned lot for nearly 30 years, so it took a lot of work to bring it back. We removed all of the invasive plants and put in native trees and shrubs that don't use as much water," Carlton says. "The lot also borders Cleveland Park and overlooks Richland Creek, a tributary of the Reedy River, so it's a gateway to both of those natural areas. We're trying to stress the Green aspects of the project both inside and out."

## Futuristic Forester

After living in rural areas and suburbs for most of his life, Carlton admits he's a little surprised to be taking part in an inner-city environmental experiment. But as a professional forester and wildlife ecologist, he has spent most of his career finding ways to conserve and replenish natural resources.

So when his family moved to Greenville, the forester was a natural choice for the board of Upstate Forever. Founded in 1998, the nonprofit organization works with local governments and builders to protect undeveloped lands, promote clean air and water measures, and encourage environmentally sensitive growth across the nine-county Upstate region.

When the board asked for ways to better educate the public about saving and sustaining resources, Carlton decided that clarity begins at home. "We heard a lot of plans, and finally I said, 'Let's not just tell people what to do; let's show them,'" he remembers. "So after our kids left home, Brenda and I decided to build the Upstate House."

## More Than a Home

The couple wanted to do more than build a house however. They also wanted to create connections between public and private groups that would encourage other energy-efficient developments in the Upstate.

"It took us about five years to get everybody on board," Carlton says. "We worked with the Homebuilders Association of Greenville, city and state governments, and about 50 different vendors who eventually donated time and materials. It's great that all these people came together to protect and sustain this special place."

Carlton hopes the project will create other special places. "The main reason we did this is to show people that

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they can live comfortably while still doing the right thing environmentally," he says. "If more of us start now, it will be better for our kids and grandkids. At least, that's my hope for the future."•

*Upstate House: 620 Pettigru Street, Greenville, SC 29601. To arrange a tour call (864) 250-0500. For information on other Upstate Forever projects, visit [www.upstateforever.org](http://www.upstateforever.org), or call (864) 327-0090.*

### ***Southern Living Takes the LEED***

Upstate House isn't the only Greenville-area home that has visitors seeing Green this summer. Last month Southern Living opened its Cliffs Cottage Showcase Home at Furman University. Designed by architect Scott Johnston, who also worked on the Upstate House, the 3,000-square-foot Showcase Home is located at The Cliffs Communities development on Furman's campus. One of the country's first residences to receive a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certificate, the home will be open through June 2009. For more information visit [www.furmancliffscottage.com](http://www.furmancliffscottage.com) or [southernliving.com/greenguide](http://southernliving.com/greenguide).

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**James T. Black**

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