

GREEN LIVING

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Loving local

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CONFESSIONS OF
A GREEN WANNABE:
**CONVENIENCE
VS. CONSCIENCE**

WINE COUNTRY:
**TASTING ROOM HELPS
FULFILL OWNER'S VISION**

ECO-FRIENDLY
HOME RENOVATION:
**REMODEL BALANCES
ELEGANCE, EFFICIENCY**

A GREEN GREENHOUSE:
**BACKYARD STRUCTURE BUILT
WITH SALVAGED MATERIALS**



Marcus Larson / News-Register

Claus Christiansen and Annette Skinner love their new home, which is both environmentally friendly and suited to their European-influenced taste.

THREE TOWERS OF GOLD

Remodeling makes house cozy, as well as energy-efficient

By **STARLA POINTER**
Of the News-Register

DUNDEE — The sounds of running water and birdsong greet visitors when they arrive at the Wilson Fjord Vineyard homestead, informally known as Three Towers.

The golden yellow house's nickname is a nod to Claus Christiansen's native country, Denmark, where a trio of towers denotes good fortune. And it fits, as one tower conceals the pump house next to the driveway while others rise from the house and an adjacent workshop.

"I had to have a tower," Claus said, looking fondly up the spiral staircase

that leads to the one gracing the roof of the house. "It's a tiny room with a nice view, for fun."

He and his wife, Annette Skinner, added the towers during a renovation project that transformed a small, older house into an airy three-bedroom model that's just the right size for the couple. They said it's "hyggelig" — Danish for "cozy."

In any language, it's also green.

Designed by Portland architect Matt Daby and carried out by Cellar Ridge Custom Homes, the Three Towers features sustainable and local products,

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Marcus Larson/News-Register

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environmentally friendly building techniques and energy-saving systems.

“The project was driven by their aesthetic,” said Carson Benner, co-owner of Cellar Ridge. “We accommodated that while staying true to the green.”

Christiansen grew up in Jutland, the northwest peninsula of Denmark, and lived in Copenhagen for several years. He served in the Danish Navy from 1969 to 1980.

He moved to U.S., settling in Texas, to work for Aranco Oil. Then his work took him to Saudia Arabia for 17 years.

When he retired in 1999, he settled in Seattle, one of the places he’d visited on his annual trips to the U.S. “Boston and Seattle were the most European cities I saw in the U.S.,” he said. “I chose Seattle.”

That’s where he met Skinner, an attorney who had retired from Microsoft.

They decided to move to Oregon, her home state. They spent a couple years looking at both houses and lots before finding just the right site in the Dundee area, within easy visiting distance of two sisters in McMinnville.

The dwelling didn’t suit their tastes, but they knew they could open it up and rearrange the rooms,

Cellar Ridge’s Carson Benner said the company paired the homeowners’ aesthetic sense with environmentally friendly building techniques and materials to make the home “green” and comfortable. The breakfast nook above features magnificent views, as well as the Danish sideboard the couple found on their travels. Cellar Ridge reworked the space so the large piece would fit.



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all the while making it more energy-efficient. “We took the opportunity to create our own vision,” Skinner said.

Since there was plenty of space left on their sloping seven-acre lot, they decided to plant a vineyard, too. “It helps us blend in with the neighborhood,” she joked.

Both Skinner and Christiansen had been involved previously with building and remodeling projects. Approaching this one, “We wanted someone we felt confidence in, and we really liked the idea of building green,” she said.

He said, “Green is the right thing to do. We’re both fairly environmentally conscious. In the long run, it pays off.”

Their wants included a bit more space, a garage, a ground floor master suite, a pleasing appearance, a rain-water collection system, solar panels, great insulation and energy efficiency.

The green features include:

Separate thermostats to serve the first and second floors, so the couple can heat only the areas they are using. A heat-recovery ventilator that constantly brings fresh air into the house, while exhausting stale air and stabilizing the humidity.

A rainwater collection system accumulating 5,000 gallons for irrigation and toilet-flushing. Wells that feed three fountains, producing a welcoming sound for visitors.



Marcus Larson/News-Register

Three Towers has a Mediterranean appearance, with stucco, a concrete tile roof and golden paint. It’s situated to take advantage of the view.

Low-maintenance, drip-irrigation landscaping designed by a neighbor, Scott Picker of Aspen Creek Landscaping. European-style vegetable and herb gardens designed by Skinner.

A set of solar panels producing enough electricity to meet 30 to 40 percent of the couple’s needs. Double-wall, super-insulated construction and centralized plumbing.

An exhaust fan that runs for 10 minutes each time the garage door opens, to remove fumes and balance humidity. Floors of tile and hardwood, rather than carpet.

A built-in vacuum that exhausts to the outside. Plenty of energy-efficient windows and all low- or no-VOC paint.

Sustainably produced, local and reclaimed building products were used throughout the project.

Reclaimed walnut serves as flooring downstairs, accented by colorful area rugs. The flooring came from Wood is Wonderful, which reclaimed it from an old barn and cut it with a steam-powered mill.

“It has character, dents, wormholes,” Skinner said. “We love it.”

The 12x12 oak beam visible in the kitchen is reclaimed, as well. It came from an old textile factory in Philadelphia.

Old rafters from the house — 20 foot 2x12s — were recycled to make the shop floor. Now Christiansen, who loves woodworking, has room to finish the boat he started building in Saudi Arabia.

Sand in the stucco came from the Columbia River. Juniper for trim and decorative woodwork was harvested

from a sustainable forest near Bend. Workers discovered, after starting the project, that the original stucco had let in water and rotted out the wooden wall.

Cellar Ridge not only had to replace the wall, but rethink the way the new stucco was applied, Benner said. This time, a rain screen separates the stucco from the wood surface, allowing water to drain away.

Benner and his crew also had to make an adjustment in the dining room mid-construction, because Christiansen and Skinner had a change of plans.

On a visit to Denmark, they fell in love with an antique sideboard. They asked builders if they could tweak plans to accommodate the piece.

Other features include an office/library/TV room with built-in shelving for books and collections. The couple jokes that this is Skinner’s room.

“I have to beg permission to come in,” Christiansen said. “She gets this. I get a little landing.”

Indeed, his office space once consisted of the landing at the top of the stairs. During the remodel, the stairs were reconfigured, opening up space on the first floor.

Both Christian and Skinner enjoy Three Towers’ comfort, appearance and environmental touches.

But they didn’t just create their cozy home for themselves. They also were thinking of Sophie, their golden lab.

As people enter, they are greeted by a bench on which they can sit to remove their shoes. As Sophie and her friends enter, they’re greeted by a dog-washing station.

BOOK REVIEW

“STRAPHANGER: SAVING OUR CITIES AND OURSELVES FROM THE AUTOMOBILE”

Taras Grescoe
2012, Times Books

In “Straphanger,” author Taras Grescoe contends that using public transportation or human-powered methods of getting around, rather than individual driving cars that gobble fossil fuels, is our only hope.

But to get people to pedal, walk or ride buses and trains, those options must be readily available and easy to access: Homes must be built close to shops and services or with ready access to public transportation; walking and cycling paths must be plentiful and safe; buses and trains must be frequent and must go where users want and need to go, rather than where land is cheap enough for tracks to be built.

A pipe dream? Not at all, says Grescoe, who puts his money where his mouth is, rather than putting the pedal to the metal. The writer, who lives in Montreal, Canada, knows how to drive, but has never owned a car. Rather, he walks, bikes and rents a car occasionally, but does most of his traveling and commuting by bus or train. He truly is a “straphanger,” as the title suggests.

For this 2012 non-fiction volume, he experienced public transportation around the world -- from the carry-everything bikes in Copenhagen to the high-speed intercity trains in Japan and Europe (shining examples, he says) to the buses and subways of New York and Los Angeles (imperfect, he says, but showing signs of getting better) to the limited options in sprawling Phoenix (which he calls “a nightmare” and “the antithesis of any city I could imagine living in.”). And one chapter of his book is devoted to two West Coast cities that he says are making tremendous strides — Portland, with its growing system of light rail; and Vancouver, B.C., with services and new housing starting to cluster around its well-integrated system of sky trains, buses and water transportation.

In each place he visited, Grescoe gathered telling statistics and interviewed transportation officials, advocates and opponents. Their explanations and comments round out the book, making it much more than just a collection of his own impressions and opinions.

Well-reported and very thought-provoking, “Straphanger” makes a persuasive case about the need for better public transportation, more use of what’s already in place and policies that encourage people to move around without cars — and about the urgency of that need.

Starla Pointer
The News-Register

