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Coconut Grove family designs 'green' dream home

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ALLISON DIAZ / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Rendering of the future home in Coconut Grove of Randall Moreland, Principal with Moreland Architecture, which he has designed himself to be LEED certified.

Many homeowners fantasize about lower utility bills, a home that can easily withstand a hurricane and a customized design made for their family alone.

One couple from Coconut Grove is about to make that vision a reality.

Randall and Laurenne Moreland are designing their dream home, a 3,600 square-foot, environmentally certified, Florida Cracker-style residence in Coconut Grove.

"We're creating our own space for our own lifestyle," said Laurenne, a school counselor.

Randall, principal architect at Moreland Architecture, is in charge of technical aspects, like choosing building materials and creating a floor plan that works. With input from Laurenne, he designed a space that will serve as both as his office and a comfortable living space for their growing family. Randall also hopes the house will serve as an illustration of the type of work his firm can do.

The house will also be LEED certified. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. It is an internationally recognized building certification system that adheres to a set of environmentally friendly standards.

"We've tried very hard to be an eco friendly couple," Laurenne said. "We're the kind of people who have our AC up 10 degrees higher than other people, we keep the windows open till the last possible minute and we drive hybrid cars."

Randall's design features elements like a rainwater harvesting system, solar panels on the roof, low overhangs to block out the sun and landscaping that uses native plants and requires no irrigation. He also created a unique living space for his family. The couple has one young daughter and another on the way.

"All the living spaces are open and the children's bedrooms are very small, so the family will be all together when we're home," Randall said. "The space for the family will be a separate wing, so we can close it off and lower the AC."

The Morelands are still in the process of getting their plans certified and approved. They hope to break ground in eight to 10 months.

For Randall, the house is a culmination of his life's work.

"I used to beg my parents, ever since I was little, to hop in the car and drive to certain areas around town to see the houses," he said. Randall said he has been sketching versions of his dream home all his life.

"My first sketches were informed by the homes I saw growing up in Michigan, homes that have to shed snow and have thicker insulation."

After moving to Florida, Randall adopted a vernacular style and began tailoring his designs to the subtropical climate.

"I'm trying to tap into how they designed their buildings before air conditioning," he said. "They controlled the natural air flow, and had low overhangs to block out the sun."

The Morelands say that one of the benefits of designing your own home is knowing exactly where all the materials come from.

"It's nice to know what kind of paint is on your walls, what kind of insulation you're using, what kind of drywall, in terms of knowing what your children are breathing," Laurene said.

While moving day might still be ways off, Laurene said the whole process of designing an eco-friendly home has been easier than she expected.

"Doing it on your own with an architect isn't scary," she said. "It's doable for a young couple. You can make your own home and be environmentally friendly and it doesn't have to cost a fortune."