By Linda Lambert

You may have read that Texas Hill Country residents have been testing for many years the green philosophy of employing sustainable guidelines on a scale of one to five stars. Homes are rated in six areas: energy efficiency, water efficiency, materials, chemical use, indoor air quality, and health and safety. Local materials and components are used in as many as possible. The Wilkens home is one of the first of its kind in the United States. The Wilkens beautiful home is located in The Trails at Horseshoe Bay, a gated Tom Fazio golf course community.

The Wilkens home is that of a green built home need not have a "cold as steel" atmosphere. The Wilkens home was awarded a 5 star rating. The Austin Energy Green Building program rates new and remodeled homes using sustainable guidelines on a scale of one to five stars. Homes are rated in six areas: energy efficiency, water efficiency, materials, chemical use, indoor air quality, and health and safety. Local materials and components are used in as many as possible. The Wilkens home is one of the first of its kind in the United States. The Wilkens beautiful home is located in The Trails at Horseshoe Bay, a gated Tom Fazio golf course community. The Wilkens home is a delightful place to sit and read on rainy days. The stunning earth-toned fiber glass tank surrounded by cinder blocks, mortar and rebar. The Wilkens home is that of a green built home need not have a "cold as steel" atmosphere.

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Tree with an auger to keep it healthy.”

The Wilkens got the idea for the attractive design of their cistern from one they saw on a trip to Italy and Greece. Inside the rock façade is a 10,000 gallon fiberglass tank surrounded by cinder blocks, mortar and rebar. The home’s rainwater collection system was designed by Innovative Water Solutions of Austin. Water stored in the cistern is used throughout the house. Off the back 2/3 of the roof rainwater is collected through the galvanized gutters which feed into a trenched out system of PVC pipe. The property’s natural slope provides a gravitational route to the tank. Cistern water is pumped into a filtering system in the garage by a one horsepower pump. A pleated filter takes out large particles in the water, then it passes through a charcoal filter and finally an ultraviolet light that kills bacteria. “When we leave home we can turn off the entire system by turning off one valve. A mere one inch of rain falling on 1000 square feet of roof will provide 600 gallons in the cistern’s tank and since we collect off about 4,000 sq. ft of roof space, we can collect about 2,400 gals with every inch of rainfall. Rainwater’s pH is neutral so it is perfect for internal use and eliminates a need for water softening systems. Since there is no calcium buildup appliances last longer.” At the front of the house, wine barrels at the end of each gutter catch rainwater that is used for Karen’s vegetable garden. “There are a lot of green inventions coming out that are not yet fully tested, but we are convinced that the importance of conservation will become an increasingly important priority in homebuilding as time goes on. People are beginning to realize that our water supply is not endless," said Karen. Mary McLeod, the single-family coordinator for Austin Energy Green Building, recently stated: "The biggest misconception about green building is cost. Design is where you get your savings. With any house, to get a good result you have to have a good design. If you get certain basics like orientation, window placement and overhangs right, chances are you’ll have a house with less energy bills. Call us for green building information or to verify a home’s star rating.” The main number for Austin Energy Green Building is 512-482-5300. Go to www.austineenergy.com to find information on Green by Design workshops, held four times a year.

Now that their dream home is complete, Karen has more time for her many hobbies, like studying the large variety of native grasses around Indian Creek at the back of their lot. “This is a real work in progress, but we are having fun with the finishing touches, like employing organic practices in the landscape. We have a worm compost bin, and brew aerobic compost tea for the gardens. Soon I'll start training native vines around the cistern. We feel very fortunate to have chosen Horseshoe Bay as our final home.” A plaque in the Wilkens living area reads, “May our home always be too small to hold all of our friends.”

The Wilkens home is framed with foam and steel panels with metal studs. There is no wood in the lower part of the house and the insulation is 5 ½” foam. “We are basically living in a large cooler,” said Karen.

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