



ROTH CONVERSION

Attorney Jim Roth turned an 'environmental hazard' into the home of his eco-friendly dreams

BY ROD LOTT | PHOTOS BY SHANNON CORNMAN

As an attorney with Phillips Murrah's energy and natural resources practice group, Jim Roth is all about being green. So he had to practice what he preaches when it came time to build a home, by going the sustainable route.

That wasn't a problem for him.

"We are all connected to the earth that provides for us," Roth says. "I just have the thought that we have a responsibility to do right by it."

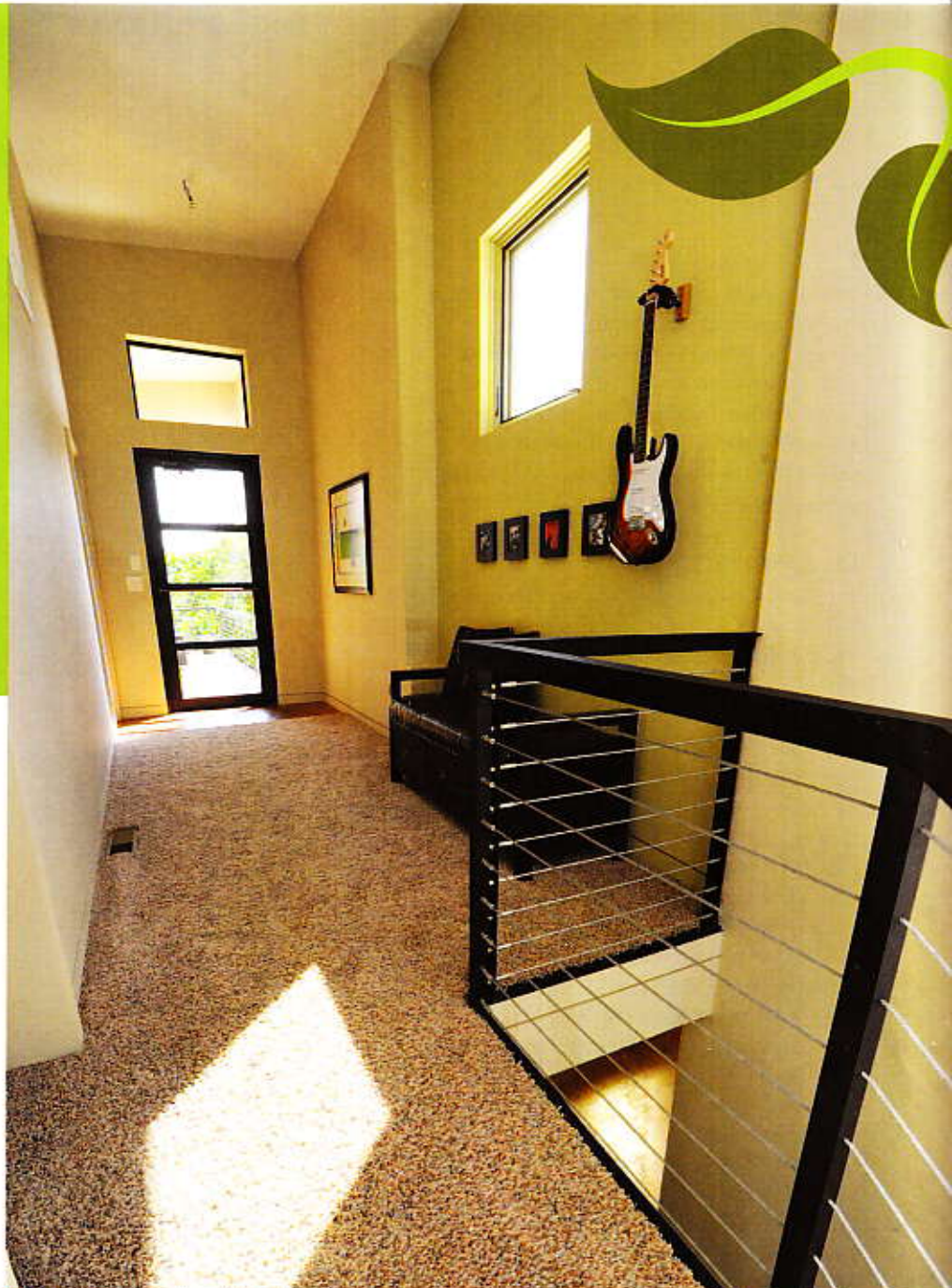
Easier said than done. After studying topographical and flood plain maps, he found a site appropriate for the abode he wanted on 17 acres on the city's northeast side, just off Wilshire Blvd. But letters to the land owners resulted only in rejection after rejection.

It fit everything he was looking for, right down to sitting on a hill with a view toward the south (and the state Capitol). But it took the former Oklahoma corporate commissioner and county commissioner literally years to secure the spot. His luck changed when he was thumbing through land records one weekend and saw that the property had changed hands.

The new owners: friends of his.

"So I approached them about the northern half of their 17 acres," Roth says. "I always wanted to find a place that felt serene, had some agricultural or rural feel to it, but very modern."

One wouldn't have thought "serene" or "modern" at the time. The property was home to a dilapidated 1940s cinderblock



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house, as well as two rotting Ford pickup trucks, some rabbit hutches, chicken coops and three Dumpsters full of debris and scrap metal.

"It was really kind of an environmental hazard, so it was nice to take it from that to what I hope, I think, is a small ecological footprint," Roth says.

ON A PRAYER

And how. Calling upon local architect Jay Yowell of JY Architecture to design his eco-friendly dream home, Roth waited patiently as construction took 20 months. His move-in date was this past March.

"I wanted a home that felt comfortable and peaceful, and yet, a maternal feeling. So you end up with a small home that is on a large piece of land," Roth says. "That is very unusual. Conventional lending doesn't appreciate that, I can tell you."

Ever a voice for going green, he says he believes people overbuild more house than they need, without thinking about the costs it takes to run the residence.

However, he had. His new, two-bedroom, self-sustaining home is all-electric, has its own water well and septic system, and utilizes three geothermal units for heating and air conditioning, relying on a half-dozen geothermal wells on the property.

Walls stand 11 inches thick with Styrofoam and concrete for thermal efficiency. White material on the roof



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reflects light, so the sun isn't constantly bearing down on the AC. To reduce heat loss, the house has few windows on its north side. Hot water operates on-demand, so he's not paying to heat it 24/7.

"I was on a wing and prayer for some of this, because it wasn't until we got it built and starting using the home in its full capacity that I got a utility bill to confirm I got it right," Roth says. "Last month, I got my first utility bill, and it was \$77. There's no city services, because I recycle. There's very little trash."

The project was a learning experience



for both Roth and Yowell, who had never before built a house from the ground up. The architect says others can duplicate their results.

"The main objective was to show that a modern, contemporary, green home could be built in Oklahoma," Yowell says. "There are not too many of them. You can do this, too."

FOUND HORIZON

Inside, the details of Roth's home pay tribute to the land on which it sits. Roth himself created the floor-to-ceiling collage in his bedroom; the piece

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depicts the earth, grass and sky, with pieces of blueprints and plans worked in. Even photos from various phases of construction are included, cut into shapes of leaves taken from the property.

Kitchen and bath cabinets are suspended for the sake of motion-sensor fluorescent lighting underneath. Sinks and bathroom fixtures are low-water. All the appliances are high-efficiency.

"They're intentionally designed to be below the counter, just for the sake of avoiding visual eye pollution," Roth says.

Another ocular-opulent touch was the home's consistent use of horizontal lines, which Roth picked up from green design books.


"Horizontal lines help a home feel more appropriate to the property," he



says, "so all the wall tile is horizontal, the design in the cabinets is horizontal, the handles are horizontal — all to help your mind feel more grounded to it."

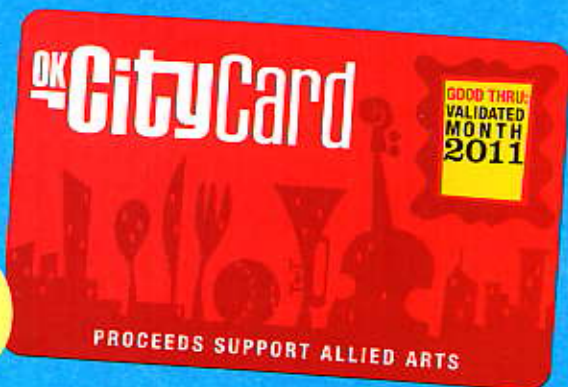
As he says, "it's the little things."

Such as the bathroom countertops, constructed out of recycled glass with firemen in South Oklahoma City who make the slabs as a side business, using a 50/50 mix of clear and brown beer bottles.

"I'm proud to admit I actually drank some of the product," Roth says. "I threw in a couple bottles of Bombay Sapphire gin, just because I like that light blue." 

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