

# Builder/Architect



## The Future Looks Green

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JEFFREY DINKLE  
 ICON DEVELOPMENT CORP  
 PO BOX 422614  
 ATLANTA GA 30342-9614

PRSRT STD  
 Auto  
 U.S. Postage Paid  
 Tucson, AZ  
 Permit No. 2172

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About seven years ago, Jeff Dinkle, President of Eco Custom Homes, caught the green bug. "Where I am today is a result of the Southface Energy Institute and the EarthCraft building program. While training with Southface and learning the EarthCraft principles, my eyes were opened to a new philosophy about building green and creating energy-efficient houses," Dinkle explains.

Today, Eco Custom Homes prides itself on a reputation for quality and caring for the community — and the earth. Focusing mainly on high-end, custom new home construction, Eco Custom Homes are 100% built to EarthCraft standards. Dinkle elaborates on the company's philosophy: "We believe that it is very important to use products that are good for the environment.

As a leader in sustainable custom homes in Atlanta, we also use Old World craftsmanship to keep our homes 'period' in detail, but update interior spaces to fit today's modern lifestyles."

That combination of detail and quality is also seen in the fact that each Eco home is designed uniquely for its lot — and each lot is a

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registered wildlife habitat. Dinkle adds: "We take great measures to make sure our new homes have similar design characteristics to the surrounding neighborhood, so they 'fit' the neighborhood while not diminishing the enjoyment and value of the existing residents." Recently, Eco has focused building in the areas of North Buckhead, the new city of Sandy Springs and the historic neighborhood of Virginia-Highland.

Beyond the obvious outward details, the real fine points in Eco Custom Homes would have to be behind what meets the eye. "We are constantly trying to push the green limits," Dinkle explains. "It is so important for today's new homes to be efficient, and to be healthy — not only for the home buyer, but also for the greater community."

Dinkle says that to be successful with an energy-efficient or green house, the philosophy must extend throughout the systems the houses as well as in its building quality and the products used. Rainwater retention is high on his list, especially with the Atlanta-area's severe droughts in 2007. "We also work with superior green products like recycled paper countertops, top-of-the-line spray insulation, and low VOC, or ceramic-based paints."

While most of Dinkle's clients, the home buyers, are usually well-versed in the green movement and environmentally focused, he does admit that sometimes it has been difficult to find the right partners for working with the products that set Eco Homes apart from the rest of new home construction in the area. "We found an alternative countertop product, made in the Pacific Northwest, and it was a challenge to find someone here to install it correctly. But, after that



PHOTOS BY ECO CUSTOM HOMES



learning curve, and the training, if a manufacturer or craftsman is really sharp, they understand that this is the way of the future and they embrace the new technologies and new products. It's a real trickle down effect and there are then benefits for all of us in the Atlanta community as a result."

Dinkle says that his company is constantly researching, testing and implementing new products for their homes. This practice furthers their efforts of reaching the goal of building zero-energy usage homes. In 2007, Eco Custom Homes was successful in attaining their goal of achieving 100% EarthCraft Gold Certification for each home they built. All Eco homes earn the ENERGY STAR label as independently verified by a third-party to ensure they meet Energy Star's efficiency guidelines.

In the Virginia-Highland project that was recently completed, rainwater is the main source for the irrigation system — with a 500-gallon above ground tank collection system. Eco also uses radiant barrier roof decking featuring the product Tech Shield — a transparent, flexible, nonconductive protection coating that molecularly bonds to all surfaces. It waterproofs, rustproofs, resists ozone and ultraviolet rays, protects electrical wiring and terminal connections, prevents mildew and provides adhesion for slippery surfaces.

On-demand hot water systems are standard for each Eco home. This is of particular importance to Dinkle: "For several years, we worked with manufacturers to design systems that solve a number of issues that large homes have with these on-demand hot water systems. In the standard hot-water system, though you may not need it, you are heating and re-heating the same water numerous times each day. That is unnecessary and wasteful." The solution: tankless heating technology — a more efficient way to heat water while saving money and recapturing valuable storage space. Using the latest in gas technology,



this system heats water on-demand and delivers an endless supply of hot water for as long as the homeowner needs it.

HVAC is another area that Dinkle has focused on and that he says offers a great benefit when approached with efficiency in mind. "When you look at the tonnage rate and savings of an efficient system with good insulation and air tightness, the savings almost pay for the upgrade. Builders have to think that way. The technology is not that difficult, but the benefit is so great."

Eco Custom Homes also feature thoughtful touches for better living including a central vacuum system that routes outside the living space to the garage, instead of to the basement (better air quality and cleaner environment). And homes are also designed to promote positive energy flow using the ancient Chinese art of placement or feng shui. So not only do Eco Custom Homes truly feel good — they are good, all the way around, for the homeowner and for the community and environment.

When asked why he is so passionate about green building, Dinkle doesn't hesitate. "I guess if you ask, 'Has it been more profitable?' The answer would be no, but it's not always about that. I do this because it's the right thing to do." Dinkle's philosophy is far reaching and he explains that he believes people with the means should set an example for everyone else in the market. "There is always something more for me to learn about," he adds. "There are more and more options with green components, rainwater harvesting, education, consulting, people will always need houses, and energy is not getting any cheaper. We just have to create more buzz and educate more people about the benefits of healthy living — not just for each of us as individuals, but for the earth as well."

*For more information, please visit*  
[www.ecocustomhomes.com](http://www.ecocustomhomes.com). ■

