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The Dark Horse Is Green

Jesse Gries emerges as the 2012 Parade of Homes Frontrunner to capture the Grand Hacienda Award



Plenty of outdoor gardening, entertaining, and living amenities arose from conscious planning on how to use a miniscule 800 square feet of outdoor lot space. Gries' home won the Best Use of Resources Award.

Opposite: The hydroponic green wall was the shoe-in for winning the Best Indoor Air Quality Award. When planning the original design, Gries' wife Karla noted the existing skylight and said, "Let's build a green wall." Located near the bathroom, Jesse was able to divert plumbing to provide the necessary water for a pleasing indoor green space.



Meet Jesse Gries—founder of Green Star Builders and winner of the 2012 Grand Hacienda Award. At this year's Parade of Homes tour, Gries was the little guy in a land of giants. This innovator and relentless idealist brings a new and desired approach to building, combined with a powerful spirit to back it up. When someone so unexpected wins such an acclaimed award, it sets a precedent for architectural and building changes within Northern New Mexico.

Walking through the front door of Gries' home for the Parade of Homes tour, I am immediately captured by his enthusiasm. The first attraction is the hydroponic green wall that automatically recirculates water and maintains and monitors pH, temperature, and nutrients. It's not often you see tropical plants in the high desert, and this homemade feature is even more impressive because it requires such little upkeep.

The next attraction is the basement cooling system and full Heat Recovery Ventilator (HRV). The HRV recirculates fresh air from outside throughout the house and removes stale internal air. Heating and cooling costs are expected to be a microscopic \$70/ year due to this innovative system comprised of a tankless boiler that senses the exterior air temperature and a super-insulated exterior shell. These features helped Gries achieve one of the most prestigious certifications for U.S. government green



The water catchment system is made from sculptured steel cubes crafted by Gries and filled with cisterns from Craigslist. The cherry tree in the foreground was an original feature of the lot, and the Grieses “fought tooth and nail” to keep it alive and thriving.

building programs. His home is the first in New Mexico to be certified for the Energy Challenge Home program, issued by the U.S. Department of Energy. The energy efficiency of the house also secured an Emerald rating by the Santa Fe Green Building Council. Gries’ home is a rarity in that its energy efficiency is secured without using solar or geothermal features—effective and sustainable technologies that were not within the budget for this project. Homeowners can note that there are indeed low-cost options to sustainability and efficiency.

Continuing the tour, Gries shares his obsession with minimizing waste and salvaging materials: “I see scrap as inspirational. That sabino beam was brought here from Mexico; this bench used to be a walnut tree on Palace Avenue that was salvaged after the blight; and we received these file cabinets free off of Craigslist.” Looking around, it seems as if everything in this household comes with a story. The external minimalist style contains a



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The house also won Best Kitchen in its price range, with a 15-year-old Viking stove, tile chosen from close-out, and handcrafted walnut cabinets by Gries' father.



Steel windowsill handcrafted by Gries, a *sabino* wood beam as a central feature, and grey plaster as an accent offer an elemental design focus combined with purposeful planting on the outside to bring the green inside.

complex depth that creates a special connection between builder, owner, and home. The house is livable and comfortable—packaged together with a modern flair to create a simple yet edgy abode.

Wide-eyed and contemplative visitors stroll from room to room, investigating the creative innovations Gries has pieced together. He is a pioneering go-getter, and his appetite knows no limits. His early summer job experience, helping his father as a cabinetmaker and contractor on the East Coast, planted the seed for Gries' career. He then found his own niche in high school by becoming skilled at steel fabrication, which ignited his desire to master all aspects of building and design. Whether it's laying the foundation, installation, steel assembly, mechanics, or building furniture; Gries incorporates all aspects of hands-on construction from the ground up.

Gries' style is dictated by the lot itself, which began as a basketball court and gazebo. He



reacts to the space he is given to work with and lets his imagination flow, pulling ideas from all directions. He sees the big picture by envisioning a livable, spacious, and bright floor plan. He then figures out how to incorporate green technologies, reclamation, and ecological principles. Redwood reclaimed from the gazebo was used as base plates for the foundation of the house, and two layers of concrete from the basketball court were taken to be recycled at the Lafarge plant. Final details are then incorporated to create luxurious accents and comfort through his steel manufacturing and experimental fabrication.

Gries' creative flexibility produces a thriving building style that encompasses a broad spectrum of insight and design. His unique approach is one that values restoration and attention to detail, and can be emulated by others, whether freshly constructing a new home or refurbishing an existing one. Jesse Gries is one man pushing our community to see the value in innovative, green-built, energy-efficient, and affordable homes.

The floating kiva is a new take on an old style; Gries hand-fabricated the hearth and door out of steel. The Kiva is dual-fuel, it can be gas or wood. The transom window above was another bid to bring the outdoors in and to fill the living room with light. Gries also won the Best Craftsmanship award for the house.