

Lofty Goals03

Attic Conversion to Master Suite

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FACT:

Opting for open shelving rather than closed cabinets greatly reduces the amount of wood used on a project.

FACT:

In a budget-constrained project, simple steps, such as removing dropped ceilings, create the illusion of a bigger house.

This attic-to-master-suite renovation stays true to the client's green intentions without busting the budget.

Greg Kraus, a project designer with the firm Otogawa-Anschel Design-Build in Minneapolis, Minn., says he's got a simple rule of thumb for dealing with clients, which often pays big dividends in the long run.

"I always say to them, 'Tell me what you consider to be your reachable dreams and what you consider to be unreachable dreams,'" Kraus says. "I think it's easier to take a big idea and focus it down and make it fit the client's budget than to approach it the other way around, where you're constantly trying to fit a new element in."

"Making a list of everything they might possibly want not only helps you go through and decide on priorities, but it also gives you the flexibility to say, 'Hey, while I was doing the design, I realized we have a great space for those books you said are languishing in boxes in the basement,'" Kraus explains.

When Kraus met Matt and Chris Massman, the couple pointed him to their largely unfinished and drafty attic and asked him to design a master suite with a bathroom, a good-sized closet, and a decent home office, while leaving room for storage and a possible second bedroom for guests. They also wanted to keep the entire space as wide open as possible.

"The nice thing about working in Minneapolis is that people will call and say, 'We want to do a remodeling project, and we want it to be green, and, oh, by the way, it's a master bedroom or a kitchen or whatever,'" Kraus says.

"Selling green isn't the challenge—our founder Michael Anschel has done a wonderful job promoting here in the Twin Cities and across the country as well. Sometimes the biggest challenge is finding green products that fit the client's budget," he says.

To help meet the Massman's budget, Otogawa-Anschel did the design, and the homeowners did most of the construction with the help of a local handyman.

The designer says he also relied a great deal on the reuse of material, including leftovers from a kitchen remodel the Massman's had previously done themselves.

"They had salvaged some of the cabinets from the original kitchen, and we able to take a former pantry and convert it into a linen closet for the new bathroom," Kraus says.

He reused the couple's existing Douglas Fir floors, and spec'd recycled tile in the master bath.



"We also did open shelving, rather than closed cabinets, so that we could save on the amount of material used," Kraus says.

While the designer says he typically avoids using carpet in projects because it traps allergens and is often "in itself, a kind of nasty product," he did use a little bit in this project, choosing a wool carpet with a natural backing and then tacking it down with a low-VOC adhesive.

"One of the things that helped us achieve our green goals was the openness the client wanted," Kraus says. "Keeping the space open allows natural light to flow through the space and reduces the need for artificial light. At the same time, the space allows for a cross wind up there, creating a natural cooling effect in the summer."

"Again, it was a matter of being green, but also doing it within budget constraints" he continues. "So what you have in a case like that is a challenge to be creative about manipulating the existing space."

In creating the office area, Kraus removed the existing dropped ceiling and then wrapped the structural posts running from floor to ceiling with recycled Douglas Fir, which creates the illusion that the rooms are separated by big, heavy timbers.

PROJECT DETAILS

- > **Location:** Minneapolis, Minnesota
- > **Builder:** owners Matt and Chris Massman
- > **Architect:** Greg Kraus, Otogawa-Anschel Design-Build, Minneapolis www.otogawa-anschel.com



 The homeowners wanted their former attic transformed into both a master suite and a home office space. To make the upstairs 'livable' in both summer and winter, the architects replaced poorly performing single-pane windows, with energy-efficient Marvin products. The open design allows cross-breeze cooling.

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"It's important to remember that you shouldn't use your talent for designing for effect just because you're designing to be green," Krause says. "In the case of the posts, that was definitely a case of taking a green approach to creating a visual illusion. The same could be said about the simple act of removing the dropped ceiling. For this project we didn't add any dormers or change the roof line, but by making these changes, we made the rooms seem larger."

"Being green, at its most basic, is very much trying to use what the house already has," Kraus emphasizes.

Other green features included the use of spray foam insulation to seal the building envelop and, the one extravagance, the installation of a mini-split air-conditioner, which Kraus described as "uber-efficient" at keeping a fairly wide, open space, cool.

Steeped in Artistry

What quickly becomes clear when interacting with staff members at Otogawa-

AFTER

BEFORE



Anschel Design-Build's office is how proud they are of being relatively small, decidedly artistic, and completely dedicated to green and sustainable design.

The firm was founded by Michael Anshel, an artist who deferred the start of college for what turned out to be a four-year journey in the Far East. When he returned to the United States,



BEFORE

AFTER

The designers used light, reflective, low-VOC paint to make the most of natural light from modestly sized windows.

Anschel enrolled in the University of Minnesota, where he secured an art degree with a minor in Chinese.

According to Kraus—who joined the firm five years ago and whose responsibilities include conceptual design, lead design, material selection, 3D-modeling, and drafting—Anschel's passion for artistic expression is the foundation upon which the company has grown.

"Basically, Michael had gotten into house painting and really mixing things up with color, when a client wondered

whether he could remodel a bathroom for them," Kraus says. "A short time later, another client asked whether he could do an addition for them, and it just kind of snowballed from there to where we became a full-scale residential design-build company."

But early on, the details of construction were a mystery to Anschel; As a result, he often showed up on construction sites with books he had borrowed from the library.

"I'm told code officials loved it because they knew the



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This natural quartz surfacing product is available for a wide variety of uses in the home, including countertops, floor tile, vanities, fireplace surrounds, and showers. Available in scores of colors. www.cambriausa.com



MARVIN WINDOWS

Marvin offers a variety of energy-efficient replacement and new construction options in its hundreds of window and door options, including Low E II, LoE 366 Glass, and Tripane glazing. www.marvin.com

owner of the company was determined to do things the right way," Kraus says. "But it really was a case of a company growing out of a lot of on-the-spot learning of how to do things, and from there we've grown to a company of 11 people that does everything from new construction to simply helping people select a color scheme for their home."

Kraus, whose own design aesthetic is rooted in the juxtaposition of traditional forms and modern elements, says that for him, designing green is both a practical matter and an ethical one.

"It's a way for my conscience to be comfortable with the fact that someone is going to live in this home when I'm done with it," he says. "I don't want to put that person in a home and have it filled with chemicals or be susceptible to mold. I want whatever we're doing for the client—whether it is a room or an entire house—to be as healthy an environment for them as possible."

"As a result, I always use low- or no-VOC Benjamin Moore paint, water-based finishes, and formaldehyde-free cabinetry, and I also try to source FSC-certified wood products, so that we know the wood is grown properly," Kraus continues.

"At the same time, we try whenever possible to use products that contain recycled content, so that we are not using virgin material and so that in the unlikely event somebody would want to remodel one of our projects, we capture that kind of cradle-to-cradle aspect as well," he adds.

Brand-wise, Kraus says every project is different, and the team consistently tries to introduce new products and techniques into its residential work.

"Of course, everybody has certain things they go back to. After all, a cabinet is a cabinet,



ATTIC

and a countertop is a countertop. But I'd say when it comes to our overall approach to tackling a project, the first thing we try to do is make sure our stuff is sourced locally, that the products come, at the very least from within a 500-mile radius," he says.

"That can be difficult sometimes—for instance, in the case of plumbing fixtures—but generally speaking, we do pretty well at that," Kraus adds.

Stretching Budgets

Another example of being green within the client's means is Otogawa-Anschel's ongoing Larson Project (see "In the Works," next page).

During its first phase, Kraus was asked to create a bedroom in what typically is an undesirable location: space over a garage.

"We insulated the bejesus out of that with

 The original, mostly unfinished attic space was transformed into a flexible suite that doubles as a guest quarters.

KEY GREEN FEATURES

➤ **Open Floor Plan.** The client wanted a largely unused space to be transformed into a bedroom, office space, and sitting room. But rather than cut the space up, the designer incorporated all of the uses into a wide open space to allow for better daylighting and ventilation.

➤ **Local Sourcing.** The company tries to source as much as possible from local suppliers to reduce a home's carbon footprint. One example in this project, was its sourcing of countertops from Eden Prairie, Minn.-based Cambria.

➤ **Recycled Materials.** Douglas fir flooring was used as a design element to dress up support beams in the project space. The owners also used granite remnants from other construction firms.

➤ **Low-VOC Paints, Stains and Finishes.** Benjamin Moore's brands can be found throughout the home.

➤ **Foam Insulation.** Spray foam tightened up the walls and ceiling considerably.



TOTO DUAL-FLUSH TOILET

Water-saving dual flush toilet offers the option of a 1.6 gallon flush or 0.9 gallon flush, depending on need. The company offers several high-efficiency styles, which come in six colors. www.totousa.com



The new bathroom features low-flow faucets, recycled tile in the shower, a Toto dual-flush toilet, and a Minnesota-made, Cambria quartz countertop. The linen cabinets are made from a former pantry, the elements of which were saved during an earlier kitchen remodel done by the homeowners.



a very dense spray foam, partly and obviously to keep out any chemicals and fumes that would rise up from the garage, but also for climate con-

trol because, after all, a garage is a big pocket of air susceptible to huge temperature swings in a climate where the temperature is in the 90s during the summer and can be 40-below during the winter," he explains.

As in the case of the Massman project, Kraus asked the homeowners for their want list and accommodated it, plus additional functions that the clients' didn't expect would make the cut, like a make-up station in the bathroom. The engineered wood floor of the bedroom is veneer made up of scraps leftover from the creation of solid wood flooring, and the granite counter top in the bathroom is a remnant from a granite yard.

The biggest difference between Massman and Larson projects is that Otogawa-Anschel is both the designer and the builder on the latter

project, a state of affairs Kraus prefers.

"Before I worked with Michael, I was at a firm where we'd do the drawings and then the homeowners would put the project out to bid," he says. "That kind of situation is always a cat and mouse game in terms of staying apprised of the materials that are actually being used."

"With design-build, we know exactly what we talked about with the homeowner, and we can communicate that down to the tiniest detail to our building staff," Kraus continues. "The other thing is, over time, designers tend to create their own language and their own short-hand for things, and our carpenters speak in those same terms. That teamwork approach and level of communication between all members of the team really heightens the homeowner's peace of mind."

Such a long-term approach suits Kraus just fine.

"When we look at a phased project, we basically get everything planned out and leave some of the work, like purchasing plumbing or lighting fixtures, to the homeowners themselves," Kraus says. "I think one thing the economic crisis has done is caused people to get even more creative about how to stretch a budget. Less is more."

IN THE WORKS

When it comes to the projects the company is working on currently, designer Greg Kraus says the key words are "kitchen" and "attic." Kraus says one approach he's taking with clients is to suggest that they make the most of their money by focusing on one small detail in a larger scheme and making that their focal point.

Case in point: Kraus recently installed a metal roof on a home as part of a green makeover.

"The nice thing about a metal roof is that it is about a quarter of the weight of an asphalt roof, it's fire resistant, and it will last three to four times as long as an asphalt roof," he says.

"The other thing is that metal roofs, unlike asphalt roofs, don't retain all that heat. And last, because they're cut to fit, there's a lot less waste involved when a metal roof is installed," Kraus adds.

