



Loop Design Sustainable Homes

Adrienne Breaux *Photos by Mark Herron*



When architect Christy Seals of Loop Design was asked to create a house for her friends Christie and Eric Hepburn, she knew she was in for a challenge. The lot sported nine mature post oak trees and the homeowners had a long list of eco-friendly ideas to incorporate. The resulting Undertree House isn't just a project decked out in the latest green gadgets, but rather a home designed from the start with simple sustainability in mind—proof that a modernly-designed house can be at once respectful, innovative, and meaningful.

The first thing you notice about the Undertree House, which was recently featured on the AIA Austin Homes Tour, is its approachability. Unlike other new homes that loom close to the street and take up too much of their lot, the

house is set far from the road, behind and below those gorgeous oak trees. At two stories, it's taller than its one-level neighbors, but it doesn't dominate the street.

Featuring a modern exterior and a streamlined, brightly-colored interior, it's the home's sustainable features that steal the show. Loop Design's focus, rainwater collection, plays a big part in the Undertree House, but it's Seals'



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common sense approach to sustainability—utilizing solar orientation and integrating green systems from the beginning—that makes the Undertree House such a unique success.

Along with a standing-seam metal roof designed to maximize rainwater collection, a pier and beam foundation so as not to disturb the trees, and plenty of eco-friendly materials, the star of the home is the rooftop container garden. A railing constructed from bolted-down animal feed containers is a perfect example of what Seals believes makes her firm stand out the most: understanding that a roof is more than just a roof.

“The pieces of your house can do multiple things. The roof doesn’t just keep the sun out, it’s for collecting the rain, for deflecting the heat, a place you can put solar panels—it’s doing three different jobs,” she explains.

Other eco-friendly features to the home are sustainable spray-foam insulation, solar-heated hot water and native plant landscaping. Perhaps most surprisingly, even though it’s only 1900 square feet,

the house feels spacious due to its outdoor areas like the breezeway, decks, second floor terrace, and courtyard.

Though Seals has completed several large house projects since Loop Design’s inception a few years ago, the Undertree House, with its simple but cutting-edge green design ideas, has thrust the young firm into the well-deserved spotlight.

“I think the reaction I’m getting from the Undertree project being well-received on the AIA Homes Tour is that it resonates with people,” she says. “We are good at making houses very specific to their sites; that integrate their systems in a way that is functional and meaningful. We come at rainwater collection as architects, and we think about them creatively. I would like people to hire us because we can make a good house on a beautiful site that is responsible for itself.”

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