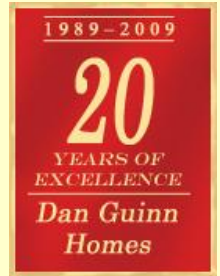


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HOUSE WISE

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It's the Solar Home Tour!

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Fall is in the Air

By Elizabeth Guinn

There is a chill in the air in the morning once again and over the barking of my overly protective black lab outside I hear the familiar sound of a school bus drive by while I enjoy my morning coffee, yes folks it is fall. There are no leaves changing in my yard at my house just yet, but there is a change in the air, a feeling that summer has come to an end. Maybe that change in the air is from a sweat soaked football uniform from my son's practice last night! One thing is for sure I know I am not excited about dealing with those clothes later. Do you find yourself asking the question "What exciting thing happens in the fall?" Is it the kids going back to school? Is it the fact that football has begun? Although these events are something to look forward to, except possibly the sweaty football clothes even for those of us who enjoy football, that is not it. Can you guess? The circus is in town? No, it's the Solar Home Tour!

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Dan's Desk

By Dan Guinn

I was recently reading an article "Who do you Blame for your Energy Lemon" by Alex Wilson on FineHomebuilding.com about using an energy star label system for new homes. This is a good idea for informing prospective new home buyers about the performance of the home they are about to purchase. My question is what about the homes out there that are already built? There needs to be a standard by which all homes are measured for energy efficiency. One way to accomplish this is by comparing BTU's of usage per square foot. The way that this works is you can break down the amount of energy any given



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Last October 4th and 5th, 140,000 people in 49 different states came out to tour their neighbor's homes and check out energy saving improvements. Why? Because every October for the last 14 years, the American Solar Energy Society and the Department of Energy together have sponsored the Solar Home Tour. If you have ever wanted to make some energy efficient changes to your own home but wanted to actually put your hands on some of the technology first, now is your chance. You get an up-close and personal look at the latest and greatest energy efficient features Hampton Roads has to offer. On October 3, 2009 Hampton Roads is now joining other cities around the country and joining the Solar Home Tour. Hampton Roads is featuring fourteen homes from Virginia Beach to Seaford with all these homes open to the public so you can talk with the owners and builders themselves. This is the part that is most exciting to us and will give us an opportunity to meet with and network with you our devoted readers.

Not that interested in solar you say? Well that's o.k. the tour features many other energy saving technologies that can save you money on your energy bills. Like for example you want to know what is the real savings with Geothermal or ground sourced heat pump systems, and you wanted to talk with someone who actually had one instead of just the salesman who was trying to sell it to you? This is a golden opportunity; there are several homes on the tour that have geothermal systems. Others have solar panels of course, high tech insulation, specialty windows, and solar hot water heaters just to name a few interesting features. Now is your chance to get your hands on some of this energy efficient stuff, see it working for yourself, and always the most interesting part to me talk to the people that own it and love it.

Want to take advantage of some of the energy efficient tax credits by installing energy efficient upgrades but you're not sure which one is right for you? This is going to be the place and time to find out just how well some of these energy saving features could work for you. Yes, you will have to travel some to get to see all these cool systems, but well worth the effort. There will be a wealth of information out there on the tour just waiting for you to discover. In my opinion nothing can substitute real world results and seeing with your own eyes just how these systems and technologies work. Come out and tour some of the houses and ask these homeowners if they think their money has been well spent. Consider this, getting a tax credit on top of saving money on your energy bills that's just icing on the cake to me.

Where will I be on October 3rd? In Seaford at the Ross-Clunis home showing off what spray foam insulation, high efficiency HVAC



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*Taking you from
Dreams to Reality
Psalms 127:1a*

house uses by the square foot. This allows you to compare apples to apples with any size house just by comparing the BTU usage. It has been my experience that this is, in my opinion, the most equalizing method of comparison. I wish I could take credit for this idea but I cannot it was first introduced to me at my energy efficiency classes and makes very good sense to me.

If you think about it, is it the home builders fault that the houses we live in today are so inefficient? Is it the inspection process that is to blame? Do we need stiffer regulations to make every one conform? Or is it the home-owners who insisted on the least expensive home. I don't believe that it is any one reason for the problem we have today, but rather we all have played a part in the inefficiency problems of today's homes. It is not because of better technologies and techniques because they do exist. It is what we consider as important to us in a home that causes the rift. You know what I mean, the builder offered a free upgrade for custom cabinets or for only five hundred dollars more you could have R-39 in your attic. Which would you choose, probably the cabinets and so would most everyone else because who cares about insulation when you are talking about the home of your dreams.

The answer to this problem will take a collective effort on all parties. The home buyer has to be educated on what an efficient home is, and demand such homes. Home builders need to exceed current code requirements and follow up behind sub-contractors more carefully (police themselves; don't expect the code official to do it!). The codes need to be stiffened to reflect higher efficiency standards, and codes enforced in full. All this leads us to the current way of doing construction as a whole needs to change, from the buyer to the end product.

A standard like BTU'S per square foot would help to establish a guideline for all parties to follow and would encourage healthy competition in the right direction. Imagine instead of the granite counter tops and hardwood floors being the topic of discussion at your neighborhood picnic, instead you discuss who has the lowest BTU's/sq' in your neighborhood. Probably not going to happen in anyone's home but mine , but If you decide to purchase a house with a bad rating at least you have been informed, and can take action to improve your house immediately. Time and time again I meet homeowners that have no idea how their house is performing until we show up and test the house. Quite honestly neither did I before all this became important to me. The heart breaking part is I find major energy loss problems that have gone un-checked for decades, and the homeowners had no idea that they had these problems. Would it not

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make sense to test our houses at the time of purchase? I like how Alex Wilson sums it up in his article by comparing the current building industry to the failed auto industry. Are the American people ready to bail out the building industry? After all we continued to purchase cars that were inefficient even though the American car industry refused to change. Are we going to continue to purchase inefficient homes?

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systems, superior windows and doors, and advanced framing techniques can do for your energy bills. We have incorporated many new and exciting features into this home and can tell you more about them. Why not come out and watch as we show you first hand with our test equipment how well this house performs. Have you ever seen a blower door in action, this is your opportunity as we will be performing many blower door tests throughout the day. Maybe you're just curious about all this energy saving stuff or don't know much about Energy Audits and want to know more? Drop by and see us, we would love to talk to you and show you around.



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