

The building is small, its environmental stance big

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ATLANTA, GA—It can be done. Sustainable architecture and green building principles can be applied to even the smallest buildings and homes.

The best example in Atlanta is a 2,820-square-foot, two-storefront building on Edgewood Avenue near the Martin Luther King Jr. Center.

The building, first constructed in 1946, is being brought back to life in the healthiest of ways — recently receiving the highest level accreditation by the U.S. Green Building Council.

It is the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, platinum building in the city of Atlanta and only one of four in the Southeast.

Half the building houses the Dynamic Dish vegetarian restaurant. Next month the other half will become the offices of the five-person Epsten Group, an environmentally oriented architectural firm.

Dagmar Epsten, a native of Germany, has been interested in environmental architecture since the late 1970s — long before it had become in vogue. While in college, she began specializing in the use of daylight in buildings as a way to save energy consumption.

That interest brought her to Georgia Tech's architecture school as part of a study abroad program, before returning to Germany to work on her thesis that ended up being a book (in German) called "Daylight in Architecture."

Upon graduation, Epsten returned to Atlanta, where she worked on energy-efficient design for sev-



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NAMES IN BUSINESS

eral architecture and engineering companies before starting her firm in 1989. Along the way, she teamed up with her husband, Chip Epsten, a violinist, organic gardener and the Epsten Group's accountant.

Today, about 60 percent of the Epsten Group's work is as a LEED consultant. The firm was involved with three office towers at Atlantic Station and with the Medical Education Building at Emory University, to name a few.

The firm also is a consultant to the U.S. Green Building Council, reviewing applications of others seeking LEED certification.

A few years ago, the Epsten Group started looking around to buy a building to move the office. Up to now, the firm has been based out of the Epsten's Candler Park home. Buying a building gave the firm a perfect opportunity to practice what it preached — to build or renovate in the most environmentally possible way.

The couple decided to buy an "affordable" rundown building on Edgewood.

"It was a total wreck," Dagmar said. "The roof had caved in. And there was all sorts of trash in it."

So began their journey to transform a dilapidated structure into one of the greenest buildings in the state.



A 2,820-square-foot building on Edgewood Avenue, the first LEED platinum building in Atlanta, has a green roof, and a cistern that captures rainwater.

Among the highlights:

- The architectural office used reclaimed maple hardwood floors salvaged from a closed textile mill in South Carolina.

- All the office's work surfaces will be made from wheatboard, an alternative material made from wheat straw.

- The ceramic tile in the bathroom is made of 45 percent recycled content.

- The building has a shower to encourage people to cycle to work. There is no off-street parking "because we don't want to encourage automobile use," she said.

- The Edgewood offices use no city water for exterior irrigation or for the flushing of toilets.

- In the courtyard between the old storefront and the new construction, there is a 1,550-gallon cistern that captures 91 percent of the

stormwater. (The cistern fills up in less than three rainfalls). It took special approval from the city to be able to use the stormwater to flush the toilets.

- About half the building has a green roof with a special material made up of two layers of grain fibers with fertilizer in between, permitting plants to grow with no soil.

- The insulation is made from a soy-based spray foam.

"Every decision was made with what is the least amount of material required to do the job," Dagmar Epsten said. "We tried to get a lot of products locally [to cut down on transportation expenses]."

Green building is "a lot harder" in a renovation than with new construction because many of the products had to be customized. And getting LEED approval on a small project is more of a challenge because

of all the needed documentation.

But Dagmar Epsten estimated that the increased cost of going green was only about 5 percent higher than traditional construction.

"Part of the point of doing this is to show what LEED looks like," Chip Epsten said. The couple is proud to be part of the revitalization of such an historic neighborhood.

"It's still a rough area, but there are a lot of pioneering businesses here," Dagmar said. "This can become like a new Main Street for Atlanta."

A wave of green building is sweeping the nation as people become more aware of how they impact the environment and contribute to global warming.

For example, there will be a ribbon-cutting Tuesday afternoon on an affordable (\$150,000) sustainable home (with three bedrooms and two bathrooms) in southeast Atlanta as part of a challenge gift from the Kendeda Fund.

Both the Epsten Group and the Kendeda Fund show that it is possible to design and build smaller sustainable projects in our communities.

It's all about creating places that consume the least amount of water and energy, using materials that are not detrimental to the environment, planting trees and landscaping to cool our cities and developing communities that aren't dependent on the automobile.

The Epsten Group provides just the latest proof that it can be done.