

# DREAMSTAR CUSTOM HOMES NOT YOUR ORDINARY BUILDER

by Chris Hayes

**T**here's more than one way to build a house.

At least that's what Brett and Chris Handler, owners of Dreamstar Custom Homes, Inc., have found as they strive to construct homes that make less impact upon the environment

Brett has been building homes for the last twenty years in South Florida. However, in the last nine years, he and his wife have developed an operation that is unique to Palm Beach Gardens. Recently, Brett earned the classification of Certified Green Professional from the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). This was no small accomplishment. The NAHB program has established a high set of standards for its green program, and Brett is among the first to achieve this prestigious accreditation in Florida. In fact, Dreamstar is one of just two builders in Palm Beach County to be so honored. Then again, keeping the designation is no simple task either. To make certain that the company is kept up to date on the latest technologies requires constant researching on the latest products and ideas.

"Green technology is rapidly evolving," Chris said. "Every day we're learning new methods of helping our clients and ultimately the environment."

Interestingly, Dreamstar hadn't originally planned to go green. But one of their clients asked how they could "green up" their house, and Brett's curiosity led to some research.

"Financial savings, cleaner air, and a lighter footprint, that's the key to being green," Brett said. He now makes ritual trips across the country to builders' conventions, discovering new techniques and approaches that can be applied to their homes. When it comes to being green, the education aspect never stops.

Since adopting the approach, Dreamstar has built three homes utilizing the green building components: two in Ibis Golf and Country Club and one on Davit Drive near Lakeside Park.

So what can be changed to turn a house green? As it turns out, just about everything.



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There are seven components of a green home:

- Lot Design, Preparation and Development
- Resource Efficiency
- Energy Efficiency
- Water Efficiency
- Indoor Environmental Quality
- Operations, Maintenance and Homeowner Education
- Global Impact

“The amount of ‘green’ we put in a home is all relative to the needs, desires and commitment of our client,” Brett said.

Some of the green products and procedures used are:

Closed attic areas. “We seal off the attic from the outside, removing all soffit vents and protecting against air infiltration from below by caulking all electrical and A/C protrusions in the ceiling. Then we use a foam insulation called Icynene, sprayed directly to the underside of the roof deck. This keeps the heat from penetrating the attic and dramatically reduces the temperature in the attic. The result is A/C vents that don’t sweat and an A/C unit that works more efficiently to lower air conditioning bills as well as the greenhouse effect. The best results are gained when we add a variable speed air handler, with electronic filters and germicidal lights. The quality of the air is a benefit that cannot be equated into dollars. Clean air is priceless,” Brett said.

Additional contaminants in the air come in the form of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC). These are found in paints, wallpaper, wood floors, cabinets and doors as well as other products in the home. “Our research allows us to find products that are very low or devoid of these harmful chemicals,” Brett explained.

Photovoltaic solar cells and solar hot water panels immensely reduce the need for electricity and can actually produce excess energy. “If I have more power coming in than I use, the electric meter will turn backwards,” Brett said. “We couple solar, compact fluorescents and advanced lighting systems to control the amount of power used depending on the time of day.”

But how much more does a green house cost than a standard one?

“If you plan the project carefully from inception, it’s not that much more money at all. Many of the products pay for themselves in a short period of time through energy savings. Some products have tax credits and rebates to offset the costs. Many of our processes such as lighting choices and landscaping will require less maintenance,” Chris said. “And some things just make you feel good, that you are doing the right thing for your family and our planet,” she added.

Much of the work put into one of their homes is in the planning stage. When they build a house on a lot, instead of clear-

ing it completely, they try to leave as much of the natural environment as possible. All construction debris is recycled as well.

You’ll also find that a green home is practically indistinguishable from any other home in its price range. Upcoming projects include the first certified green home in Old Palm Golf Club. Dreamstar builds custom homes specifically tailored to the preferences of the homeowner, the site and the neighborhood. Homes range in price from \$1 million to \$8 million.

Their largest project to date – a certified green, multimillion-dollar equestrian estate called Unicorn Landing in Wellington’s Las Palmas subdivision has just broken ground. The special value of Unicorn Landing is the owner’s desire to be completely energy independent and reduce the carbon footprint to zero. In an area known for its excesses, this project will be a testament to one person making a difference.

Brett and Chris have been Palm Beach Gardens residents for over a decade and are excited to participate in the city’s recently proposed green initiative. “It’s a wonderful community,” Brett said. “It’s great to be here, and we love building in this city.”

Thanks to their recent renovation efforts, almost everything in their Harbour Pointe Plaza office, located at 11000 Prosperity Farms Rd. in PBG, is eco-friendly, from the power-assisted toilets that use just one gallon per flush, to their recycled brochures, business cards and newsletters, to the recycled carpet under their feet. Also added were sensor-controlled faucets, timers for lighting and air conditioning, and of course low VOC paint.

“We bought the building four months ago, and we’re completely updating it with green technology,” Brett said. “We are now completely occupied, and I believe a big part of our leasing ability comes from the philosophy we have with respect to the environment.”

The Handlers continue to garner attention for their accomplishments as green builders. In addition to the certification from the NAHB, Dreamstar has been BuildSmart certified and named an Energy Star Partner by FPL. The company also received the Gold Coast Builders Association Gold and Silver Prism Awards for its cutting-edge residential construction.

Undoubtedly, the Handlers have taken the green approach to new heights in Northern Palm Beach County. So much so that even the family’s dogs, Yogi and Jaq, frequent visitors to Brett’s office, were a conservation effort.

“They’re recycled too,” Brett joked. “We rescued them both.” **PBG**

*More information on Dreamstar Custom Homes can be found at [www.dreamstarcustomhomes.com](http://www.dreamstarcustomhomes.com) or by calling (561) 799-7777.*

