

Orinda's Old Yellow House

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James Wright explains the solar heating system from the attic.

Photos Cathy Dausman

Hinged dual pane interior windows hung behind the original windows conserve heat loss and minimize street sounds, as do the double thick front doors. Wright hadn't used his solar-based central heating for a month, but when he does, he says it costs him only as much as using a 75-watt light bulb. Cooling, on the other hand, costs the equivalent of using a 100-watt light bulb!

Since Wright both lives and works in the Old Yellow House, he has made the lower level a clean and green paean to technology. It starts at the entry – accessed through the “trade” door, street level. The heat exchange ductwork has been left intentionally exposed, imparting a high-tech vibe to the area. Outside light

floods down the glass and metal spiral staircase. A modern kitchen with glass fronted cabinets, chrome sink, cook island, dishwasher and mirrored, oversized refrigerator act as counterpoint to the simple main floor kitchen-cum-conference room with its lower, free-standing sink, built-in tile alcove and Hoosier cabinet.

The original freshwater well has been built up to table height and sports a round glass tabletop. Sturdy glass panels inlaid in the stone floor showcase a radiant heating system. The remaining floor is Brazilian walnut. Subflooring is R-30 rigid foam. A sliding door provides access and a view from the sitting area to the backyard.

A laundry room and full bath are tucked away on the lower level south side. Portions of the below-grade wall are encased in glass both for show and practicality. “I wanted to express the original stone foundation walls in the basement, and of course they leaked groundwater,” Wright explains. “This inspired a permeable concrete subdrain and ventilation system that I call Geo ventilation.”

Wright will welcome the public to his home March 19 with a lecture and open house (details at <https://www.facebook.com/NetZeroHomes>); proceeds will benefit local historical societies. He says the Old Yellow House blends “natural and green energy of the future coupled with (respect for) the past.”

But it's time to pay the bills, Wright says, and “I have to go back to work.”



Looking down from above on a second story bedroom. No ceilings!



The parlor features an upright piano and Victrola.

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