

DAVID JOHNSTON

Simply Grand

NATURAL HOME HELPS PBS TELEVISION HOST WANDA URBANSKA GREEN HER MID-CENTURY RANCH HOUSE BY FOCUSING ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND INDOOR AIR QUALITY.



Wanda and her 11-year-old son, Henry, holding Whiskers the cat.

The North Carolina BRICK RANCH with mature boxwoods and trees gets a facelift with a welcoming yellow door, limestone marker in the yard, and energy-efficient windows. PHOTOS BY STEPHEN CANNON

When Wanda Urbanska, host of the nationally syndicated public television series *Simple Living with Wanda Urbanska*, called to see if I could help “greenovate” her home, I said, “Sure.” Wanda had just purchased an “Anywhere, USA” 1956 brick ranch house in Mount Airy, North Carolina. Recently remodeled, the home had a new (if uninspired) kitchen, new hardwood floors and a fresh coat of paint. An east-facing sunroom had low-quality windows, which I knew would let in heat during summer and cold in winter.

Simple Living is a fascinating series about enjoying life more fully, which naturally includes eco-friendly tips. Wanda wanted to use her home’s retrofit as an example of how to make a conventional house more energy-efficient and healthy. She was committed to buying as many materials as possible from local suppliers.

Natural Home editor-in-chief Robyn Griggs Lawrence joined me at Wanda’s house to help determine likely and logical steps in greening the home. For me, the energy conservation retrofit was Priority No. 1. Lawrence focused on eco-decorating and finishes.

Once her eco-remodel was complete, Wanda furnished her home with finds from local consignment, thrift and used furniture stores. She also added Magnolia Lane’s hemp window treatments in the living and dining areas and hemp bedding in the bedrooms. “My house is transformed,” she says. “I now live in a green home, a healing environment. I’ve never been happier with a house.”

CAN YOUR HOME BE GREENED?

Send us information on your home and what you’d like to accomplish in it. You could be the recipient of a visit from one of our eco-experts. To get more information, contact NaturalHome@NaturalHomeMagazine.com or write *Can This Home Be Greened?*, 1503 SW 42nd St., Topeka, KS 66609-1265.

CAN THIS HOME BE GREENED?

PRIORITY 1: Improve Energy Efficiency

PROBLEMS: The biggest problem was an attic stairway that provided a perfect thermal chimney to draft heat up and out through the uninsulated rafters and attic vents. In addition, poorly made, double-glazed windows had about ¼ inch of space between the glass panes; glass should have a ½-inch air space to reduce heat loss.

SOLUTIONS: In the attic, we sprayed closed-cell polyurethane insulation on the rafters and sheathing to keep heat from pouring out through the roof. (A bonus was that NCFI Polyurethanes, an Energy Star partner and U.S. Green Building Council member, manufactures its premium spray foam product in Mount Airy.) Insulating the rafters also helped mitigate heat loss through recessed can lights built into the ceiling below. These recessed cans act like holes in a bucket, allowing all the heat to rise through the ceiling in winter and pulling heat from the attic into the living space in summer. Wanda also installed

new, Energy Star, double-pane, low-E windows manufactured by Norandex throughout the house.

COST: 34 new windows: \$10,000 installed. Attic insulation: \$10,000 installed.

PRIORITY 2: Revamp the Bathroom

PROBLEMS: The main bathroom's Pepto-Bismol-pink décor, dated cabinet and awkward configuration gave away the home's age. Wanda said it was always cold.

SOLUTIONS: We completely renovated the bathroom, bringing in a Vortens dual-flush, low-flow toilet and low-flow showerheads. Where the closet had been, we installed a hardwood Provence vanity with a distressed finish and a granite countertop (mined locally in North Carolina), crafted by Forms and Fixtures in nearby Greensboro. We also replaced the drab vinyl flooring with natural stone tiles, which surround the original porcelain bathtub.

Gutting the bathroom gave us the opportunity to insulate the exterior wall and the wall between the bathroom and the kitchen with NCFI spray foam. To further remedy the room's cold temperature, we insulated the floor under the bathrooms and bedrooms with Johns Manville formaldehyde-free fiberglass, providing a barrier from the poorly sealed basement below.



PHOTO BY BROOK CORWIN



The living room is transformed with Ace Hardware's LOW-VOC PAINT, luscious hemp window treatments, updated used furniture and original artwork. PHOTO BY STEPHEN CANNON



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CAN THIS HOME BE GREENED?

COST: Vortens dual-flush, low-flow toilet: \$675. Low-flow showerhead: \$75. Forms & Fixtures vanity: \$3,090. Tile floor and tub surround: \$2,100. Interior wall insulation: \$600. Under-floor insulation: \$300. Panasonic Whisper-Quiet bath fan: \$208. Labor: \$3,600.

PRIORITY 3: Renovate the Dated Kitchen

PROBLEMS: The previous kitchen remodel was adequate but not beautiful, with appliances that weren't energy-efficient. It was topped off by an ugly popcorn ceiling that Lawrence urged us to remove. Updating the kitchen provided an opportunity to make the house sing. Making a home more beautiful and livable—and therefore longer lasting—is one of the greenest things we can do.

SOLUTIONS: Because granite can be obtained just outside of Mount Airy, replacing the laminate countertop and backsplash with the North Carolina Granite Corporation's sig-

nature "salt-and-pepper" granite was a no-brainer. North Carolina Granite uses no harsh chemicals and finds a use for every scrap, resulting in a zero-waste operation.

Following Lawrence's recommendation, we added a recycling center to the built-in pantry and installed Energy Star KitchenAid appliances. Wanda added a personal touch by repurposing her mother's 1960s cotton novelty skirt into kitchen curtains.

COST: Granite countertops: \$4,000. Smooth ceiling: \$235. Recycling center: \$55. Energy Star KitchenAid appliances: \$5,946. Curtains: \$30. Lights: \$288. Labor: \$4,365.

PRIORITY 4: Relocate the Laundry Room

PROBLEMS: The laundry room was in the basement, and the historic washer and dryer had to go. The bigger issue, however, was relocating the laundry area upstairs to a more convenient location. This was a challenge, given the first floor's small footprint.

In the basement, we also discovered a relic: an old oil-fired furnace that looked like a bank vault.

SOLUTIONS: Replacing the washer-dryer with Whirlpool's Energy Star Duet combo front-loading steam washer and sensor dryer was key. Creative input from Wanda's friend Sarah Susanka, author of *The Not So Big House* book series, resulted in a built-in room divider between the sunroom and the study to house



PHOTO BY BROOK CORWIN



EXTRA: TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE PRODUCTS USED IN WANDA'S HOUSE, SEE PAGE 88.

The once-cramped bathroom was opened up by removing a tight closet and features a hardwood cabinet and LOW-FLOW FIXTURES. PHOTO BY STEPHEN CANNON



With its original wood cabinets, the kitchen was updated with ENERGY STAR APPLIANCES and a built-in recycling center.
PHOTO BY STEPHEN CANNON

the appliances and provide much-needed floor-to-ceiling bookshelves in the study. Wanda also added a free-standing rack dryer inside and a clothesline outdoors.

We replaced the heating and cooling system with a Trane high-efficiency heat pump, which should save Wanda 30 percent or more on her utility bills. A heat pump is the perfect solution for Mount Airy's climate with its high cooling necessities and mild winters. Basically a reversible air conditioner, the heat pump works well in both seasons.

COST: Whirlpool Duet washer and dryer with pedestals and tower: \$3,485. Room divider: \$350. Built-in bookshelves in study: \$801. High-efficiency Trane heat pump: \$8,780. Labor: \$4,189.

PRIORITY 5: Improve Indoor Air Quality

PROBLEMS: Painting is the most common home improvement of all, and doing it with a low- or no-VOC paint is the simplest way to assure good indoor air quality. Paint can release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the air for several years.

Though most of the house had hardwood floors, the bedrooms were carpeted. Carpet acts like a sponge, absorbing dust, dander, mites and other particulates as well as gases such as formaldehyde. When the temperature and humidity rise, these gases can be released back into the home's air.

SOLUTIONS: Wanda selected Ace Hardware's Ace Sensations low-VOC paint. In keeping with her buy-local commitment, we chose Tennessee oak flooring with a cherry finish for the bedrooms. And to keep air circulating, Wanda installed Hunter Low Profile exterior-grade ceiling fans in all three bedrooms and the living room and replaced the existing one in the sunroom.

COST: Ace Hardware low-VOC paint: \$250. Tennessee oak flooring \$2,000. Ceiling fans: \$588. Labor: \$5,020. **NH**

DAVID JOHNSTON is an author, trainer and green-building consultant whose company, What's Working, helps businesses and communities incorporate sustainability and healthy design. Find out more at www.WhatsWorking.com.

NH WEB EXTRA: Watch Wanda Urbanska's green remodel unfold on "Simple Living with Wanda Urbanska" episodes 411 and 412, airing on PBS stations nationwide. Go to www.NaturalHomeMagazine.com for a preview!

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