

HOME STYLE

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The Enquirer / Cara Owsley

Sue Mackey watches energy rater Dale Dennis of Home Energy Checkup test a window in her Loveland home.

Energy audit discovers sneaky leaks

By Amy Howell Hirt
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Sue Mackey's Loveland home is leakier than a log cabin – at least her log cabin in Michigan.

After buying the house a year and a half ago, she's had a chance to see the challenges of heating the various segments and floors of the home – originally built in the 1800s, then expanded in the mid-1900s and in 1992 – and paying the propane bill.

"I just feel like our bills are outrageous," Mackey says.

But she was still shocked to feel cold air rushing in through recessed can lights when energy raters Dale Dennis and Gerard Brauckmann audited her home.

Inside

How to do your own home energy audit, **E4**

"I would've never thought about that," Mackey says.

While many homeowners with older homes assume their money is going out the windows, only 10 percent of conditioned air is lost through windows, according to the Department of Energy, while leaks in the ceilings, walls and floors account for 31 percent.

That means that, as long as a home has double-pane windows in good condition, sealing a home against air infiltration will reap a faster return – in monthly bills and comfort – than other costly upgrades.

"They always advertise geothermal heating systems and new windows, but I'd rather have good ductwork," Dennis says.

Dennis' recommendations for Mackey – air sealing, adding basement insulation, upgrading attic insulation, replacing the furnace, replacing the recessed lights and running return ductwork to the second floor – could total \$7,000 to \$8,000, if Dennis and Brauckmann do the work, but would cut her annual utility costs in half to \$2,200, Dennis estimates.

"A lot of these things are very low-cost," he says. "Air sealing is one of the best high-payback improvements you can make. Even if you hire someone (to do the work), it's a three- to five-year payback. If you do it yourself, it's a year or less."

That's immediate gratification compared with the 100-year payback on upgrading from double-pane to triple-pane windows, Dennis says.

Home energy audit

What: Certified home energy raters from Home Energy Checkup locate the sources of energy loss in the home and generate a list of the top five improvements, the estimated energy savings and implementation costs and a long-term plan.

How: By reviewing utility bills, checking insulation levels in the attic and walls and testing for overall tightness of the home.

Cost: \$395

Contact: 513-939-9194; info@home-energycheckup.com

FRONT DOORS

Color counselor helps unify renovated rooms



Photos by Ernest Coleman / The Enquirer

John Reynolds bought a Homearama house in Maineville 28 years ago and redid it a little at a time with his wife, Conni Carlson.

By Jenny Callison
 Enquirer contributor

Conni Carlson's and John Reynolds' interior renovation project started with a problem dining room table.

Carlson tried to match the color of the rattan base to the green in the dining chair fabric, but couldn't seem to get it right. After a wrong turn with teal, Carlson took a friend's advice and called on Tracy Dean, owner of Peppercorn Decorating, for color counseling.

Dean encouraged the Maineville couple to take a holistic view of their interior A-frame, which Reynolds purchased right after the 1981 Homearama in which it was featured.

"We needed to unify the whole space, and it made sense to harmonize the main floor rooms with the kitchen, which they were planning to renovate," Dean explains.

"In the past, we had redone



Reynolds and Carlson use a golden brown sofa to divide the living and dining rooms in their A-frame home.

pieces of things, and never looked at the interior as a whole," Carlson says.

"You buy something and, over time, it provokes a project," adds Reynolds, pointing out a large glass-fronted china cabinet that ultimately caused the couple to redesign the staircase behind it.

Reynolds, an engineer, created a project "wish list" spread sheet to track the kitchen makeover, which gutted the old kitchen to the drywall. As the scope of the renovation grew, so did his spread sheet.

What emerged from the project is a series of rooms done in earth tones, with ac-

cent colors to give the rooms dimension and visual interest.

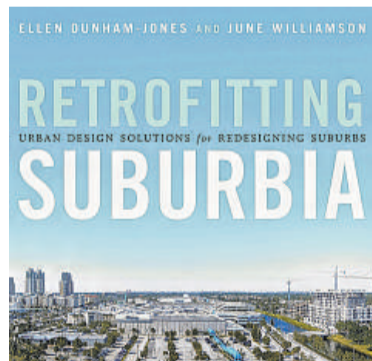
The living-dining room held a special challenge. Its walls and ceiling blend because the room's shape reflects the home's A-frame structure. Dean helped Reynolds and Carlson choose a warm tan, Sherwin-Williams' "Nomadic Desert," used on all the walls of entry hall and living-dining space, except for an accent wall of Benjamin Moore's "Mayflower Red."

"The living room paneling was natural wood before, and it was really dark," Carlson says.

The floor space is divided into two zones by the arrangement of furnishings. Two golden brown sofas are angled at one end of the room, facing each other over an elegant ottoman upholstered in a red and gold fabric. The octagonal glass-topped dining table is positioned near the other end of the room, its rattan base now a

See **A-FRAME**, Page **E4**

Book: 'Retrofitting Suburbia'



warehouse-style stores with sprawling parking lots.

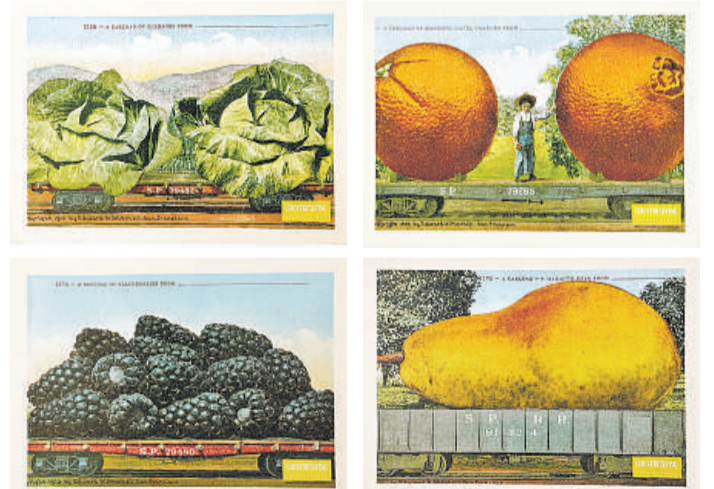
Ellen Dunham-Jones, an architect and director of the architecture program at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and June Williamson, an architect, urban designer and professor, present the argument for "retrofitting" existing low-density communities and commercial strips into sustainable, mixed-use spaces that reduce urban sprawl and the dependence on cars.

The book offers several examples of residential infill developments as well as deserted malls and "big-box" stores like Walmart made into "downtowns" with public squares, greens and public transit.

The hardcover book is currently available in for \$75 at Barnes and Noble and Amazon.com.

Amy Howell Hirt

In light of the usual focus on how to redevelop urban cores, the book "Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs" offers an interesting look at the possible future of suburbs, and what to do with all those abandoned malls and



Provided

Find: Postcard placemats


A tablecloth is not required with the crisp colors and whimsical images of these fruits and veggies placemats that celebrate the harvest in a distinctly American, idealized way.

The four designs are from postcards published by Edward H. Mitchell in 1909 and 1910 and feature gigantic navel oranges,

blackberries, cabbage and a pear out on the open railway.

The paper placemats are from Country Living magazine and Rebecca Ray Designs – based in Chagrin Falls, Ohio. \$29 for 40 placemats (10 of each design) at www.rebeccaraydesigns.com/countrylivingcollection.

Amy Howell Hirt



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COVER STORIES

Warm colors coordinate A-frame's rooms

A-FRAME FROM PAGE E1

soft brown. Dean chose the color to complement the dark brown fabric with which the dining chairs were recovered. Centered over the table is a burnished bronze and glass chandelier, its bulbs covered with tiny taupe shades.

The kitchen occupies a central position – literally and figuratively – in Carlson's and Reynolds' living space, opening to the dining area on one side and to a family room on another. As the couple discussed possible kitchen floor plans, a table once again became an issue.

"Conni wanted to keep a table we had in one corner," explains Reynolds. "It became a debate between us. Once she agreed to put the table in another room, we were able to add more cabinet space and an island."

Carlson and Reynolds give high marks to Penderly Construction, who handled the kitchen project. The Milford-based company installed cabinets along two walls and below the half-wall that is open to the family room and built a central island.

The semi-custom cabinets are made of cherry, with a caramel finish and chocolate glaze; the countertops are a tawny "Golden Beaches" granite. New appliances are stainless steel.

Dean, who began working with the couple at the kitchen stage, made color and finish recommendations, including the use of three-dimensional glass tile, in gold and brown, for the backsplash.

"This kitchen had been gray laminate with chrome accents. It looked brand-new but we wanted warmth and simplicity," Carlson explains.

Two antique pieces add to that feeling of warmth and simplicity: an oak engineer's chest that Reynolds rescued when a former employer discarded it, and a tall milk can that belonged to his grandmoth-

er. In the years since Reynolds bought the house, he and Carlson had made important changes to the family room. They tore out the mountain-lodge-style hearth of rough wood and brick, and replaced it with stacked stone and a natural wood mantel shelf. Dean helped them select a cinnamon tone for the walls, Sherwin-Williams' "Hopsacking," and layer in more brown tones with new fabric for recliner and ottoman as well as brown-patterned tailored cornices with matching sofa cushions. A brown leather sectional sofa completes the room's major furnishings.

Down the hall is the master suite, whose layout Carlson and Reynolds completely reworked a few years ago, creating a bathroom that accommodates glass-walled shower, whirlpool tub, a water closet and spacious sink area. In the latest remodel, the couple refinined the cabinets in a darker tone, replaced the hardware, and painted the walls the same "Nomadic Desert" used in the living-dining room and the master bedroom. Accents in various red hues are provided by art work on the walls and shelves, and throw pillows on the bed.

Dean gave Carlson the courage to go bold in the powder room and upstairs bathroom, using patterned red wallpaper to give each space pizzazz. In the guest room, also on the second floor, green walls provide a rich backdrop for the traditional furnishings, including a quilt made by Reynolds' mother and plaid roll-up shades at the windows.

"We're very fortunate to have some beautiful pieces handed down in our families," Carlson says. "We have been able to incorporate them, along with more contemporary furnishings, into our décor so we can enjoy them."

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Photos by Ernest Coleman / The Enquirer

Once gray with chrome, the kitchen features granite, cherry wood and stainless steel finishes.



Out is a mountain-lodge-style fireplace. In is this one made of stacked stone and natural wood.



Back in 1981, the Maineville home of John Reynolds and Conni Carlson was part of Homearama.

Energy leaks hide in inconspicuous places



Photos by Cara Owsley / The Enquirer

Dale Dennis of Home Energy Checkup works on a screen door during the audit of Sue Mackey's Loveland home.

Smoke is used to check for drafty windows in Sue Mackey's home.



By Amy Howell Hirt
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Renovated historic homes can be charming and hard-to-find gems – and they can be hard to seal.

Sue Mackey's Loveland farmhouse is a textbook example.

Built in the early 1800s, the home consists of several expansions made over the years with an eye on increasing square footage rather than energy efficiency, and has some features that limit the affordability of energy-efficient upgrades, such as knob and tube wiring that would need to be replaced, at great expense, in order to add insulation in the attic.

But as Mackey found when home energy raters Dale Dennis and Gerard Brauckmann conducted an audit on her home, sealing a home against air infiltration is "one of the quickest dollar-saving tasks a homeowner can do," according to the Department of Energy.

As part of the audit, Dennis and Brauckmann, with Home Energy Checkup in Hamilton, look at how efficiently a home performs – checking the utility bill-history and insulation levels in the attic and

Homes need air

While DIY air sealing is cost-effective, it's imperative to understand the home's ventilation system, cautions energy rater Dale Dennis.

"The air flowing out might have helped dry (the house) out," Dennis says.

An exchange of indoor and outdoor air is needed to reduce moisture and remove indoor pollutants and contaminants such as formaldehyde, volatile organic compounds and radon.

For information on ventilation concerns and moisture-control strategies, visit www.energysavers.gov.

Amy Howell Hirt

walls, and conducting tests to generate a prioritized list of the projects they recommend tackling first, as well as changes to implement long-term.

To exposes leaks in the home's envelope, Dennis turns off the HVAC and reduces the pressure within the house to create a sort of vacuum that's equivalent to 20-mile-per-hour winds blowing on all sides of the house.

As air pushes in through any available opening, some leaks are large enough to feel with a bare hand, while Dennis uses a smoke stick to find smaller spots.

Mackey has some leaks where windows meet the casing – a common problem that's easily sealed with caulk, Dennis says. But it's important to use

the right type. Silicone will expand and contract, while latex will crack. Not all silicone can be painted, so for visible places, Dennis recommends using a paintable caulk that combines acrylic latex with silicone and is rated to last for 35 to 50 years.

These small leaks, however, do minimal damage compared to less-conspicuous spots.

Can lights on the second-floor, which recess into the attic, were losing loads of energy.

"One recessed incandescent light probably costs you \$10 to \$25 a year (in energy bills)," Brauckmann says. With a couple dozen or more fixtures, that can add up fast.

Older "no-insulation contact" styles – that require a 3- or 4-inch clearance to

prevent a fire hazard – cannot be insulated, although they can be replaced with "in-contact," or IC styles. Leaky trims on these in-contact models can be retrofitted with an airtight ring from the same manufacturer, Dennis says.

Unconditioned air can also enter living spaces through laundry shoots, attic access panels and other openings that cut into the walls or ceilings.

On Mackey's second floor, an access panel for the motor of a whirlpool tub cut into the wall of a closet and drew cold air in to the room. Because Mackey has never used the tub, she doesn't mind sealing it, but a removable cover is also an option.

Focusing on improvements that will make the most significant dent in a home's energy consumption and comfort level, Dennis and Brauckmann move to the basement. Mackey's bare concrete exterior walls have the insulation value of single-pane glass, Dennis says.

Because the top 4 feet or so typically aren't buried, Dennis recommends adding batten fiberglass insulation with a fire-retardant cover to the upper portion of the walls, which will also help warm the floor of the room above.

DIY audit

It's possible to detect basic air leaks yourself, using an incense stick or your bare hand. Here are the directions from the U.S. Department of Energy.

- Hold a lighted incense stick near electrical outlets, switch plates, window frames, doors, baseboards, attic hatches, wall- or window-mounted air conditioner units and fireplace dampers to check for air flow.

- If you have problems locating leaks, you may want to conduct a basic building pressurization test: Close exterior doors, windows and fireplace flues. Turn off combustion appliances such as gas-burning furnaces and water heaters. Turn on all exhaust fans or use a large window fan to suck the air out of the rooms.
- Visually check for

gaps around pipes and wires.

- Check to see if caulking and weather stripping around doors and windows is applied properly, leaving no gaps or cracks, and is in good condition. If you see daylight around a door or window frame or can rattle it, it's leaking.

- Outside the home, inspect all areas where two building materials meet, including: all exterior corners; where siding and chimneys meet; and areas where the foundation and the bottom of exterior brick or siding meet.

- Look for cracks and holes in the mortar, foundation and siding.

- Plug and caulk holes and penetrations for faucets, pipes, electric outlets and wiring.

- Check exterior caulking at doors and windows.

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