

REAL ESTATE

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Photos by Christina Stuart, FLORIDA TODAY

Tight house. Chris Perry, owner of Riverside Builders of Brevard Inc., poses near his newly finished energy-efficient home in The Cloisters in Indialantic. The home is the first to qualify at the high-

est level by Environments for Living, a program designed to promote energy-efficiency and indoor air quality. The 3,475-square-foot home is being offered at \$949,000.

Efficiency ratings can help push homebuyer

Granite tops may be more important, but energy counts

BY ANNE STRAUB
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

Energy-conscious homebuyers have another standard to use when shopping for features designed to keep their utility bills down.

Riverside Builders recently completed its third home under Environments for Living, a program designed by Masco Contractor Services. The home in The Cloisters in Indialantic is the first in Florida to qualify under the highest, or Diamond, level.

Riverside contractor Chris Perry hopes to carve a niche for the company in building energy-efficient homes.

"It really takes time and effort," said Perry, who attained certification, submitted plans and had the homes tested to qualify for the designation.

Environments for Living joins the federal government's Energy Star, Florida Power & Light Co.'s BuildSmart and other programs that promote "green" building, while giving consumers a measuring stick to evaluate homes.

The designations are more than a nod toward environmental concerns. They've become a marketing tool, with many builders promoting a development or their entire line as energy efficient.

"We're getting in a more competitive market, and many people are aware of the move toward green building," said



Every big counts. Chris Perry, owner of Riverside Builders of Brevard Inc., says the numerous building process and energy saving devices all help keep the house cool in the summer and warm in the winter while keeping the electricity bill down. The insulation and design inside the home make it efficient.

Franck Kaiser, chief executive officer of the Home Builders & Contractors Association of Brevard.

Conservation-minded features could tip the balance between builders in consumers' minds.

Among the Environmental Protection Agency's 2,500 Energy Star builder partners are 24 of the nation's top 25 builders.

"It appeals to them because it makes business sense for them," said Jonathan Passe, residential branch communications director for the Energy Star program.

Energy Star experts worked

with Environments for Living to develop their Diamond level standards, which introduce indoor air quality requirements.

Higher-efficiency air-conditioning units, better insulation and other features will add to the cost of the home, builders say — but not as much as buyers might think.

Most builders report added costs of \$2,000 to \$3,000 to qualify for Energy Star, Passe said.

And then there's the payback.

BuildSmart homeowners can expect to save \$250 a year in energy costs, according to FPL. The EPA promises that

Energy Star homes are at least 15 percent more efficient than homes built to standard code.

To qualify as a Diamond home under Environments for Living, only 3 percent of the cool air in the home can leak through the ductwork.

Sealed and tied ducts at Riverside's new home tested at 1.87 percent, significantly limiting the cooling loss.

Tom Morris, vice president of Melbourne builder Jim Morris & Sons, uses the power-wall technique on the company's new homes, pouring concrete into foam forms.

The foam serves as insulation
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