

Something Solar This Way Comes

Bid adieu to high energy bills and blackouts.

BY ROBYN A. FRIEDMAN

JEFF MARTIN could have chosen to build any type of house on the seven acres he purchased on Lake Norman in Mooresville, N.C. But the 36-year-old, a global business development manager for Microsoft Corp., chose to build a 6,000-square-foot solar home.

"I started thinking about what my child's life is going to be like in 40 years," says Martin, the father of a two-year-old daughter. "I didn't want her to have to worry about where her power is coming from or be choking on bad air."

Martin got hooked on solar power when he saw his first solar-powered calculator over a decade ago. "It's cool that you can have nonpolluting, on-site energy creation," he says. "The elegance of it always struck me."

Solar power has come a long way in the last 20 years. Gone are the clunky panels that used to sit atop roof structures, marring the aesthetics of a home's facade. Solar

technology is now integrated into the design of new homes or added to existing ones in a more subtle, less noticeable manner. That allows homeowners to harness the power of the sun while still enjoying the appearance of their homes.

But the aesthetics of solar technology are not the only thing that has changed. The demographic attracted to solar technology has also evolved. "Our first wave of clients were folks at or near retirement who liked the idea of having control of their own energy destiny," says Steven J. Strong, president of Solar Design Associates based in Harvard, Mass. "Now we have a new generation of younger clients who are passionate about technology and the environment."

Solar-powered homes used to be popular with "tree-hugging hippies," as Martin terms them, as well as second homeowners looking to power remote island hideaways

