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Home Away from Home





1. Natural gas-fueled fireplaces add the warmth of flame to living rooms, offering both extra heat and visual appeal, and providing a lower carbon footprint than classic wood-burning fireplaces.

► High-efficiency Energy Star appliances, such as this refrigerator, help save on household electricity costs, freeing resources for projects such as rooftop solar panels.



SCOTT HARDER / PUGET SOUND ENERGY



2.

2. Adequate insulation in walls, floors and roofs is a key factor in making sure the heat inside a home stays there. Modern blown-in insulation is easier to install and provides more extensive coverage than traditional rolled fiberglass.

3. Artful use of “warm” fabrics, including throws, rugs, carpet and window coverings, helps enhance the ambience inside a home. There’s great practical value, too, in simply wrapping up in a wool throw on a chilly evening.

The Comforts of Home

Stay cozy and warm while saving money | By Debra Prinzing

The 1910 cottage that Portland residents Kate and Amy Forester share with their small child used to cost more than \$200 a month to heat during the Rose City’s chilly winters. For a 650-square-foot house, that seemed way out of line to Kate Forester, an environmental designer.

“When we bought the house four years ago, it had gaps between the doors and very little insulation,” she recalls. “We tried to boost our efficiency and improve our comfort levels by buying energy-efficient appliances and adding insulation in our attic, but it didn’t make a huge difference, so we decided to obtain professional help.”

Then the couple learned about Clean Energy Works, an Oregon nonprofit provider of home performance upgrades. The agency offers a free energy audit and helps property owners obtain financing to make their residence safer, more healthful, more efficient and comfortable.

Clean Energy Works matched the Foresters with Neil Kelly Inc., a Portland firm that specializes in home performance renovations. The audit determined how much warm air was seeping out of the Foresters’ old house. By installing window and door seals and adding a heat pump (a system that uses outside air to heat a home in winter and cool it in summer), the couple found they could make their home 30 percent more energy efficient.

“Our goal is to have the energy savings offset the cost of the loan we used to pay for the upgrades,” Forester says.



▲ Created in Portland, Indows are easy-to-install versions of the classic storm windows, and are placed inside the house, rather than outside, boosting heat retention.

The math is simple—an energy audit, a new heating device and new seals, totaling about \$8,000 (including rebates), should yield winter savings of \$60 a month. That will add up to a sizable amount of money in just a few winters.

But there's more than a bottom-line cost-benefit equation at work. While Western summers draw residents outdoors to enjoy the comfortable weather, for six months the climate sends us back inside much more often. And there we seek the sensation of warmth, both physically and psychologically.

That warmth isn't free; thus the current emphasis on squeezing more energy efficiency out of our homes. Energy costs are rising everywhere now, and home heating needs are prompting homeowners, builders and designers to seek improvements.

Today, an entire industry supports efforts to keep homes greener, warmer and more eco-friendly. And experts say upgrading a drafty domicile, as the Foresters did, is one of the smartest things you can do to cut the heating bill and create more warmth.

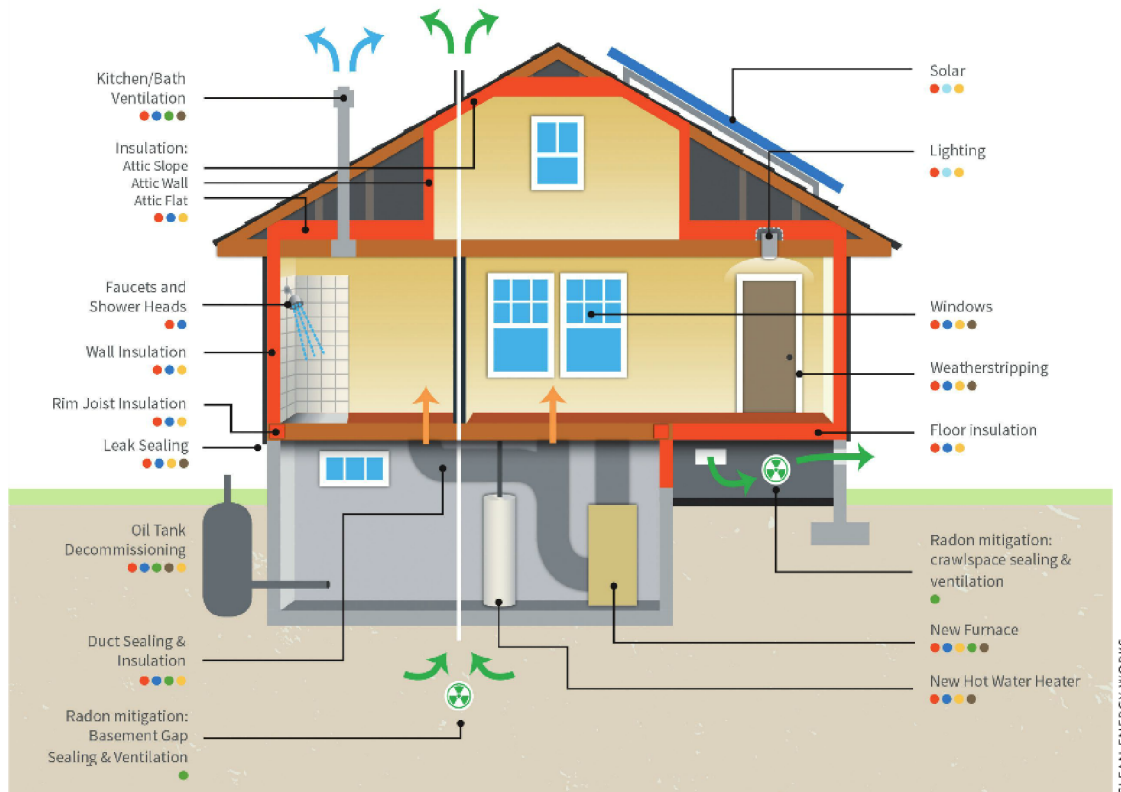
Whether small or large in scope, many options yield almost instant results, allowing you to be comfortable—and do the right thing by the environment. And many energy upgrades come with

incentives or rebates from local agencies, as the Foresters found.

Like adding compost to garden soil before ever planting a single rose, the steps you take to seal up a leaky home should precede major equipment investment or home decorating. Heating and cooling are the top energy expenses in most homes, according to Energy Star, a program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and keeping the warmth inside is the best way to economize. Whether you just want to be comfortable indoors this winter or cut your power bill in half, it's best to take a holistic approach and assess your entire home at once.

“We look at all the systems in a home and how they interact to find where you can make the biggest difference,” explains Chad Ruhoff, vice president of energy services for Neil

- **Energy Savings**
Combined upgrades can reduce energy use up to 30 percent.
- **Comfort**
Enjoy warmer winters, cooler summers and use all of your space.
- **Health & Safety**
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- **Renewables**
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- **Durability**
Increase the life of your home by preventing cumulative damage from weather and age.
- **Home Value**
Document your upgrades with an Energy Performance Score to make your home more valuable.



▲ This schematic from Portland's Clean Energy Works shows “green” home improvements.

CLEAN ENERGY WORKS

Kelly Co., the firm that handled Kate and Amy Forester's recent home improvements. "It all depends on the goals of the homeowners and their specific living environment. Maybe they want to save money and reduce their carbon footprint. Maybe their bedroom is in a poorly insulated upper story and they just can't manage to get it warm.

"We come up with a custom-designed plan for each house's owners."

Energy audits measure how much warmth leaves your house and how

much chill enters. Typical problem spots include attics and upstairs windows (where warmth escapes) and crawl spaces and basements (where cold seeps in), Ruhoff said. "Most homes built 40 to 50 years ago have way too much air moving through them—in both directions." Thus profound improvements can be achieved by sealing windows and doors, as the Foresters did, or installing completely new units that are double- or triple-paned.

While windows and doors are frequent culprits, walls and roofs holding decades-old

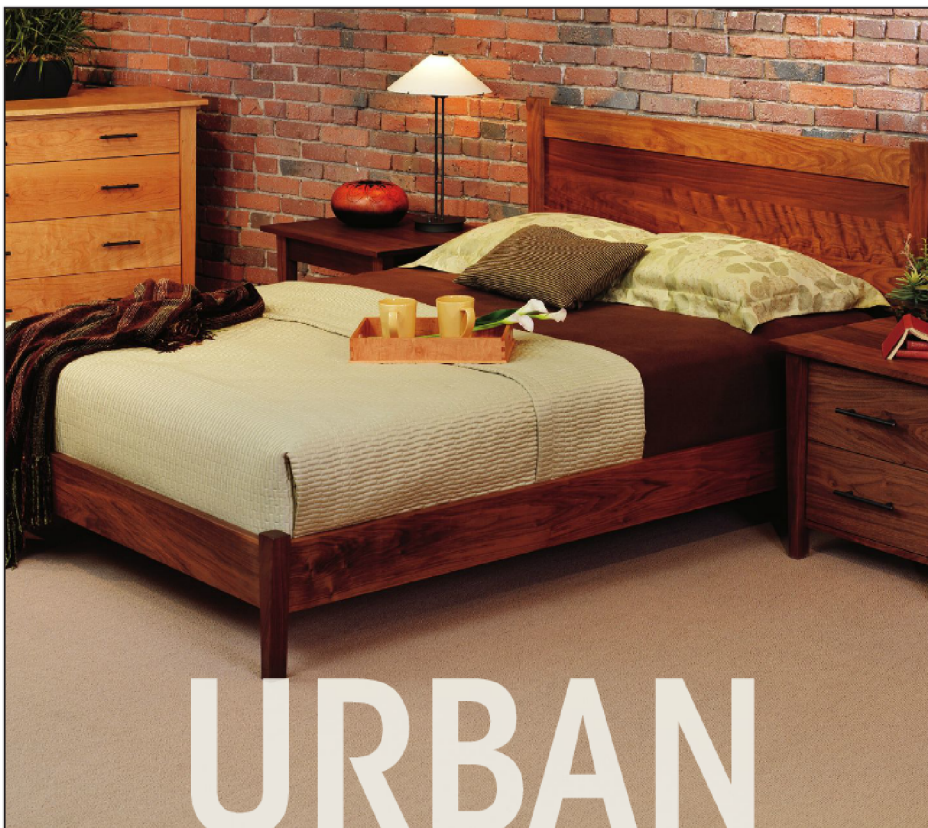
insulation can lead to heat loss, too. Contemporary insulation methods have moved a long way past those familiar pink rolls of batting, lengths of which are cut to fit and stapled between studs or joists. Modern blown-in insulation-boosting techniques are more efficient both during installation and afterward, as the insulation particles make it into tough-to-reach corners to provide much more complete coverage.

For those who can't afford the expense of re-windowing an entire house, invest in better windows in rooms where you spend the most time, such as the kitchen, suggests Ruhoff. Or, try out a new product called Indows. Designed by Sam Pardue, a Portland-based entrepreneur, the system is essentially an interior storm window made of acrylic. It fits almost inconspicuously within existing window frames using a patented silicone compression tubing system similar to the tight seal on a refrigerator door, and is easier to install than traditional storm windows. Indows can save up to half the cost of double-paned replacement windows, while owners of vintage homes appreciate the aesthetics of preserving original wavy-glass or multi-paned windows while reducing drafts associated with old sashes and pulley systems.

Windows can also bring in heat if they are situated to take advantage of the low-angle solar rays in winter. But modern technologies to utilize solar power provide added benefits, especially in a region where historically low-cost electric power meant many homeowners have electric heat. Now sunshine can provide the energy for that, too.

"Solar is probably the fastest growing and most exciting technology in home energy today," says Jim Dow, managing partner of Seattle-based contractor Schuchart/Dow. "Today, solar panel installations can be beautifully and easily integrated into a home, so there's been a shift in the consciousness of consumers and designers. Manufacturers are perfecting roofing and tiles with solar panel technology—it's quite interesting."

Thanks to government incentives,



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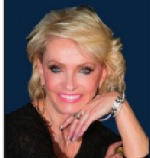
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NOW YOU'RE GETTING WARM

▶ Here are some top choices for enhancing winter warmth:

- 1. Nest Learning Thermostat** This "smart" thermostat automatically helps save energy when you're away. You can control it from anywhere using your smartphone, tablet or computer.
- 2. Tankless Water Heater** Tankless or on-demand hot water heaters are more energy efficient than traditional units because they heat water as it is used, rather than heating and reheating in a 70-gallon tank. Builder Jim Dow, of Schuchart/Dow, runs his 2,500-square-foot home on a single on-demand unit. While installation may cost up to \$5,000, the energy savings and comfort advantages (you never run out of hot water) are significant. Electric and gas systems are available.
- 3. EcoSmart Fire Designer Faith Sheridan** recommends the clean, odorless, bioethanol-burning fire-



1.



2.



4.



3.

COURTESY: FROM TOP LEFT, NEST; NORITZ AMERICA CORP.; ECOSMART FIRE; PENDLETON WOOLEN MILLS

place system that throws off a surprising amount of heat. You can convert a wood- or gas-burning fireplace with an EcoSmart insert or install a system during new construction or renovation.

4. Pendleton Throws Pendleton Woolen Mills' classic "Glacier Park" throw, honoring Montana's famous national park, is perfect for providing additional warmth in winter.—*Debra Prinzing*




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 INTERNATIONAL REALTY

from page 126 solar power has moved into the mainstream. Neil Kelly Co. recently installed a \$16,000 solar system at a home in Portland. “Incentives and tax credits paid for almost 80 percent of that,” Ruhoff reports. “The panels will yield \$400 to \$500 in electric cost savings each year.”

According to Faith Sheridan, a Seattle interior designer, “windows are important for enjoying views and bringing light indoors, but they can also be the biggest reason you gain or lose heat indoors.”

The ancient solution to that problem has been draperies, but like most textiles, draperies create a perception of warmth without improving room temperatures very much. Sheridan often recommends interior window shades. “Sun shades have become very popular—an alternative to draperies,” she says. “Made of a mesh fabric, they allow you to see through to the outside while also controlling the amount of heat you lose or gain.” She prefers manufacturers such as Lutron and Hunter Douglas, whose shade systems can be customized to suit the client’s light and warmth preferences. “It’s still nice to add drapery panels on the sides of these shades to visually warm up the room,” Sheridan adds.

Since most Americans no longer rely on wood-burning to heat our homes, the desire for a fireplace is largely emotional and aesthetic. “Most people don’t want to lug wood around,” says interior designer Sheridan, “but the psychological appeal of fire remains. I made the decision myself to switch to a gas fireplace insert in my Seattle condominium.” Sheridan’s choice is a popular one these days: many gas fireplaces are found in new condos and homes alike, because a flame conveys warmth in a season during which atmosphere matters more because people spend far more time indoors.

“What a fireplace adds is mostly symbolic,” Sheridan said. “Getting cozy. Warming yourself. Even if it’s not a source of heat, the fireplace provides the subliminal message of home.” ▲

Debra Prinzing is a Seattle-based writer.

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