



GREEN RENOVATION

BY KELLY O'BRIEN PHOTOS BY BARBARA BANKS

Michael Carlson could give Kermit the Frog a run for his money. Carlson, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP, principal and founder of Carlson Studio Architecture, wants Sarasota to know that being green is easier than you think. At his firm's corporate headquarters near Fruitville Road and Orange Avenue in downtown Sarasota, he's living by example.

Founded in 1997, Carlson Studio Architecture celebrated its 10th anniversary in March. Carlson, who has lived in Sarasota for over 20 years, was first exposed to green building while he was an architecture student at Ball State University in Indiana. There he worked with professors and classmates in the university's Center for Energy Research/Education/Service. But it wasn't until 2000 that he fully dedicated his practice to sustainability.

The staff of seven at Carlson Studio Architecture incorporates green design principles into every project. According to Carlson, with the advances in building materials, the cost of a green project isn't necessarily greater than the cost of a quality non-green building. The nature of sustainable design is that it is long-lasting and low maintenance. These attributes help to increase long-term value while decreasing cost associated with upkeep.

"Sometimes a client will be cutting-edge green," Carlson reveals. "Other times, we might have a project where we're 'stealth green.' This is when a client may not be interested in sustainable design, but we still can make simple, responsible choices without raising costs."

Examples of "stealth green" specifications include low-chemical paint. Even when a project isn't destined to be green, low-VOC paint can be specified; it's better for the environment and the health of the builders and future tenants. While all business owners are motivated by different reasons, Carlson believes that sustainable design is the right thing to do.

"Architecture is more meaningful and purposeful when sustainability is a factor," says Carlson. "In the age-old discussion of form versus function, I work to join aesthetic and utility through sustainable design."

At Carlson Studio Architecture, about one-third of the projects are residential, leaving the remain-

ing two-thirds devoted to commercial developments. The firm concentrates on Sarasota, Manatee, DeSoto, Hardee and Hillsborough counties, but it has completed projects all over Florida and a few out of state.

"I'm a licensed architect in Florida, Nevada and Maryland, but my heart is in this region, here on the Gulf Coast," Carlson admits.

In designing his Sarasota headquarters, Carlson set out to renovate the historic Cheney Building to meet the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) silver designation for Commercial Interiors (CI).

LEED-CI is the industry benchmark for green design and construction of tenant improvements. The focus is on proven contributors to employee productivity and well-being in four areas: thermal comfort, access to daylight and views, minimizing interior pollutants, and energy and water conservation techniques.

The LEED certification process benefits the consumer in two ways. Third parties certify that buildings have met the criteria for environmental health, and the market begins creating products to meet these standards. The Cheney Building renovation began in January 2007. Carlson Studio Architecture moved into the space in June, and the project was fully completed in August. LEED-CI Certification is anticipated later this year.

According to the U.S. Green Building Council, a healthy workplace environment enhances individual well being and productivity while reducing employee absenteeism and operating costs. Carlson's team employed several resources to transform the 1930s grocery store into a professional office complex that reduces environmental impact, maximizes occupant comfort, and improves building performance.

Transparent interior walls enable each workspace to have access to increased daylight and outside views afforded by the oversized windows and glass doorways that Carlson added. Cork and Interface carpet tiles were specified underfoot. Cork is a replenishable material, since only the bark is harvested, while the Interface carpet tiles are chemically free, include recycled content, and are carbon neutral.

All glues, sealants, caulks and paints are chemi-

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— MICHAEL CARLSON, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP**

REALESTATE

CARLSON'S TEAM TRANSFORMED THE HISTORIC CHENEY BUILDING INTO A PROFESSIONAL OFFICE COMPLEX THAT REDUCES ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, MAXIMIZES OCCUPANT COMFORT, AND IMPROVES BUILDING PERFORMANCE.



cally free and produce low VOCs with no "off gassing" (VOCs, or Volatile Organic Compounds, have been identified as cancer-causing agents). To continue minimizing indoor pollutants, the office is cleaned with green housekeeping methods and non-odorless cleaning products. Converted "low-flow" plumbing and other features help to conserve water and energy. Carlson estimates that installing these conservation measures will reduce water usage by 30 percent.

"We promote green buildings and green interiors to our clients every chance we get – and now we made the same decisions about cost and materials that our clients make every day," said Carlson.

While only the interior of Carlson Studio Architecture is being considered for LEED-CI certification, improvements were made to the entire Cheney Building. With investment partner Victor Appel, ASID, Carlson replaced the roof with an Energy Star roof to maximize efficiency. Adding extra insulation and high-performance glass also reduces energy use.

Carlson became known as the architect who designed the "greenest building in Florida" when his Sarasota County Twin Lakes

Park Office Complex received the LEED Gold Certification for new construction. The Sarasota Chamber of Commerce selected his firm as the first recipient of the "Think Green" Small Business Award this past June. Professionally, he is involved with several industry and non-profit organizations. He runs the committee on the environment of the local Florida Gulf Coast Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and he is on the regional board of the U.S. Green Building Council.

"When I attend national conferences, people outside this market know about Sarasota and what our county is doing with sustainable design," Carlson shares.

For Carlson, sustainability isn't simply a business trend – it's a way of life. Carlson lives green in his personal life. At home, his pool is solar-heated. He frequently carools to work with his wife, Grace, who is owner-president of Grace Unlimited, a marketing firm that shares the same address as Carlson Studio Architecture.

"It's more important than ever to seek knowledgeable, reputable third-party recognition for sustainable design," remarks Carlson. "While many projects may jump on the green bandwagon and make false claims, a technically-rigorous certification like LEED adds value to your property."

By way of its own practice, Carlson Studio Architecture is committed to quality design solutions that promote commercially-viable sustainability by minimizing the consumption of materials and maximizing their reuse, all while protecting the environment. With these easy tips from Carlson, we all can be a little greener without breaking the bank.

- Replace light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs and energy efficient T-8 fluorescent tube lighting (both are widely available).
- Use low-VOC paint offered by most name-brand paint manufacturers.
- Buy Energy Star appliances to increase the efficiency of your energy and water use.
- Increase insulation, especially in the attic, and use an efficient air conditioning system.

"Even small changes can make a big difference, and it's easier than you think," says Carlson.

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