

Deconstruction and Rebirth

Rosemont homeowner deconstructs his home; plans to replace it with an energy-efficient model.

BY MICHAEL LEE POPE
GAZETTE PACKET

Terry Hill wasn't satisfied with demolishing his home; he wanted to deconstruct it. Piece by piece, the structure that was once his Rosemont house is being taken apart to be reused or recycled — a process he expects to last two weeks. In its place, Hill plans to replace it with one that is architecturally similar to the others on East Walnut Street but radically different in its use of solar energy and rainwater reuse.

"I wanted to keep it in tune with the neighborhood," Hill said. "But I also wanted a new house."

Ripping apart the house has proven to be an enriching and enlightening process for Hill, a retired budget officer with the International Monetary Fund. He gets the benefit of knowing that his hardwood floors will be reused and the shingles on his roof will be recycled. And he has learned a few things about the 1918 house in the process.

"We found a page from a 1928 edition of the Alexandria Gazette covering one of the vents," Hill said. "It said 'Prohibition Will

Never Be Repealed.'"

The old house, which he called "an eyesore," has been in disrepair since he bought it in 1981 for \$89,900. Instead of throwing money at renovating it, though, Hill has spent the past few years planning a technological marvel that may be the most environmentally friendly house in Alexandria. Meanwhile, house values in Rosemont have skyrocketed. Back in 2000, for example, the property's land was assessed at \$70,200. This year, it was valued at \$257,800. When the \$600,000 project is finished, Hill estimates that the house and property will be assessed at \$1.2 million.

"This is the way homes will be built in the future," Hill said. "It's much more efficient."

GREEN BUILDING technology has blossomed in the past few years, and Hill has taken advantage of every new gadget as it becomes available. Radiant heat will emanate from the floor. High-efficiency windows will reduce waste. On the roof, specially designed solar panels will fit between the ruts of the tin roof — rendering

them all but invisible from the street. And rainwater will be reclaimed to use in the toilets.

"It's very exciting," Hill said as workers separated pieces of his old house into neat piles along Walnut Street. "And I'm sure my neighbors will be happy when this is finished."

Paul Hughes, president of DeConstruction Services, said that the deconstruction process typically takes about two weeks. If a homeowner is in the process of getting a demolition permit, he said that his company can spend the first week deconstructing the inside. Then, after a permit has been issued, the external deconstruction can be accomplished in a week. In Hill's case, however, he already had a permit when he approached DeConstruction Services about taking apart his house.

"Most people would come in and just demolish everything to save time," Hughes said. "But we try to save about 80 percent of the structure for reuse or recycling."

Bill Hawthorne, the builder Hill hired to construct his new house, said that he is excited to work on this project — one that he thinks will be a pioneering use of energy-efficient technology in Alexandria.



Terry Hill stands in what used to be his living room.

"Building is a process of timing and coordination," Hawthorne said. "This is not a conventional process, of course, so that adds to the coordination effort. In the end, it will be quite a house."