

RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTS

The 411

John Grable, FIAA
Owner

John Grable Architects
jgagrable.com

Year Founded 2004
No. of employees 5

BY JOEL WILLIAMS

As a child, John Grable spent summer days sitting through construction site trash piles searching for tree house materials.

Some things never change.

All grown up and a practicing San Antonio residential architect, Grable and his colleagues sometimes have spent lunch hours at junk yards finding parts for bird and dog houses they built for charity.

Today, John Grable Architects projects are enlivened by a "creative blend of old materials often playfully adapted to new applications," the firm's Web site describes.

"I feel an obligation to re-use and recycle materials," Grable says.

Using time-tested building techniques that complement nature and taking care to rehabilitate materials whenever possible, Grable calls his work "a joyous convergence of past and present."

The bottom line: Grable makes green homes that are elegant and refined.



Indeed, the May/June issue of Texas Architect Magazine features Grable's renovation of an Alamo Heights "Sunday House" — a two-story 1920s duplex — that makes use of reclaimed white oak floorboards from another house in the neighborhood. The simple design exudes the "the power of restraint, reverence and grace," the article says.

A new residential project, nicknamed the "Green Lantern," took the footprint of another existing Alamo Heights home — built in the 1940s — and brought it to life with materials chosen for durability and sustainability. The firm took much of the existing structure and incorporated it into the home through recycling and reuse of materials.

Grable chose to "re-energize that embodied energy and make it useful today."

The Green Lantern earned LEED Platinum status, the highest possible under the internationally recognized rating standard, exceeding the standard by five points. It is among a variety of green residences featured on the company Web site with a focus on sustainability and energy efficiency.

"For us, the issue of sustainability is a matter of moral responsibility and due diligence, a standard we have practiced from inception, no mere passing fad," Grable says. "We pursue potential to implement not only the most recent green technologies available today, but also time-tested passive building techniques that complement nature and reduce the load on modern systems."

The Green Lantern's heritage oaks and mountain laurels help shade the home and reduce the effects of the hot South Texas sun. Overhangs and trellises provide additional shading. Ultra-efficient windows and exterior doors reduce the heating and cooling demand. A sod roof provides an inviting and energy efficient space for entertaining. Spray foam insulation and various other products and techniques work together to reduce the energy usage by more than 60 percent.

A photo-voltaic solar energy system provides almost all of the home's electrical needs.

Mike Scott, president of BullSmart Resources, who worked with Grable on the Green Lantern, says, "John is a cutting edge architect who takes classic design elements and incorporates them with state-of-the-art green technology. He's been doing this for the last 30-plus years. Not because it's trendy, but because it's the right thing to do."



→ green homes ←

JOHN GRABLE ARCHITECTS

Biggest challenges of being green in your industry?

Associated costs for building a project eligible for certification. The process needs to be streamlined to the point that accreditation becomes part of the normal city permit and inspection process.

An instance when you heard "No," but found a way to make the answer "Yes?" Always. It is the job of the architect to think outside the box in order to find equitable and creative solutions.

What local city or county organizations, departments, or people have been most supportive in your green endeavor?

The clients are number one in this department — second is the local government entities and rebate programs from the utility companies.

How do you measure the effectiveness of your green practices? I measure effectiveness in how far I can push a sustainable solution whether it gets accreditation or not.

What impact does your company or project have specifically on San Antonio's environment? I believe the impact of this residential project will be huge ... more so in how it influences the neighbors and local community leadership after it gets built. Interest within the community has been enormous and all eyes are focused and intrigued by its green components.

How does your firm go above and beyond what's required in saving resources? By constantly resourcing past suppliers and sub-contractors and sharing this information to current clients and contractors to find the best solution.

Something that surprised you along the way during you or your company's journey to be green? How it has quickly become a mainstream movement after exercising conservation efforts for decades, because it was the right thing to do.

Dispel one myth about being a green company. That you don't have to build a spaceship to incorporate conservation-oriented solutions to the final product. Exercising company practices that conserve energy and recycle materials cast off by your product production efforts by tapping into programs already in place initiated by government or activist groups.

