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# Allergic Living

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4 fabulous houses built to breathe

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HEALTHY HOME

# Beautiful, Not *Breathtaking*

To live in a healthy home you never need to sacrifice style. Our columnist discovers four stunning properties that illustrate how superb design can mesh seamlessly with cleaner air and greener living. But most remarkable of all is what these homes do not have: loads of VOCs and respiratory triggers.

by JENNIFER VAN EVRA



## Kent Road

Scarsdale, New York

It was eight years ago that Jan Flanzer discovered her house north of New York City was contaminated with toxic mold – an infestation that left her and her family sick, sensitive to indoor pollutants, and seeking a healthy home. That search turned into a Scarsdale-based business called Healthy Home Builders, and now Flanzer, along with contractor Peter Donovan, have made it their life's work to build homes that are focused on clean air, pure water and cost-saving energy.

“We have choices about the food we buy, and the clothing we wear. We want to make sure people know they have a choice about where they live, too,” Flanzer says. “Most new construction is full of toxic chemicals – unless you specifically research and find products that are as good or better, and don't have the chemicals in them. That's what we do.”

Kent Road is a six-bedroom, seven-bath, colonial-style home that has a warm, traditional look, but inside the home also offers state-of-the-art technology that maximizes energy efficiency, water purity, and above all, air quality.

**Heating/Cooling/Air Filtering:** The house features whole-home HEPA filtration and an energy recovery ventilation (ERV) system that ensures a steady supply of fresh, filtered air. A garage exhaust ventilation system also keeps carbon monoxide, benzene and other harmful elements of car exhaust from entering the home.

**Flooring:** The flooring is primarily reclaimed oak from a company called Reclaiming The Past, based near Memphis, Tennessee, which refinishes wood from old buildings and barns. It's tinted with a chestnut stain rated zero for VOCs, and coated with a safe substitute for polyurethane called StreetShoe. In the bathrooms and hallways, the designers used stone, ceramic tile and slate.

**Cabinets and Counters:** All of the cabinets were custom-made from solid maple in upstate New York – minus any harmful stains and coatings. “Cabinetry is usually the most dangerous, in terms of reactions and toxins, because if it's not custom cabinetry that's solid wood, it can have toxic glues and formaldehyde,” says Flanzer,

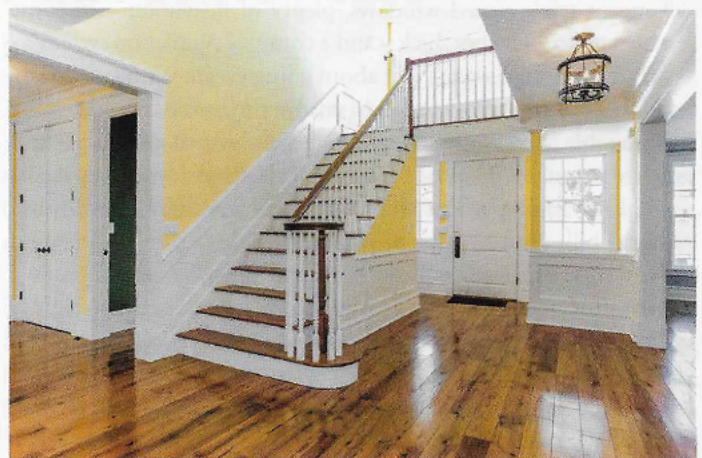
“and that is just brutal to off-gas.” The countertops are made from Absolute Black granite.

**Wall Finishes:** For paints, the designers opted for Benjamin Moore Ultra Spec 500. “We found that Benjamin Moore is the best with the zero-VOC paints and primers,” Flanzer says. Underneath is a special mold-resistant drywall by National Gypsum.

**Insulation:** Recycled denim insulation by UltraTouch was the insulation of choice, both because it doesn't contain harmful chemicals, and because it provides great sound deadening. Elsewhere in the home, the designers used blown-in cellulose, a non-toxic insulation made from recycled newspaper.

**Extras:** The home has a host of other features, among them a solar hot-water heating system, a whole-home carbon water filtration system, and a cistern for collecting and recycling rainwater.

At every step, the subcontractors had to use only products that Flanzer, Donovan and their team had sourced. “If they had slipped up with one little product because they ran out of something and went to get another half gallon of paint that wasn't the same, it could have cross-contaminated the whole job,” Flanzer says. “So we had to be really careful.”



**Top:** Solid maple cabinets are free of finishes. **Above:** Floors are built from reclaimed wood with chestnut stain rated zero for VOCs.