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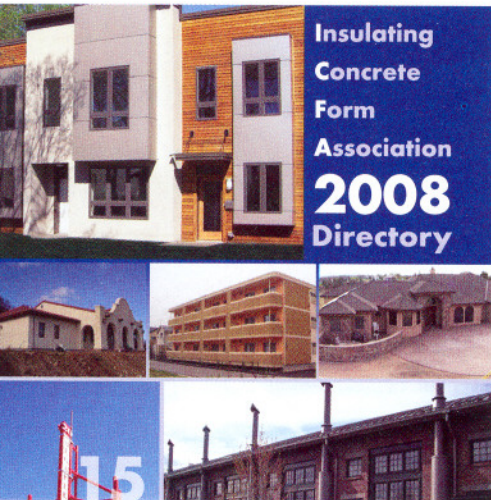
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Cover photograph by Theo Krenek, TEK Construction, Inc.

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## Texas Façade, ICF at its Core

ICFs couple with environmental  
features for a healthy homerun

○ text by LYSSA MYSKA ALLEN

"IT'S KIND OF LIKE YOU WANNA EAT YOUR OWN DOG FOOD," SAYS THEO KRENEK, PRESIDENT OF TEK CONSTRUCTION, INC., "I WANTED TO TRY IT OUT ON MYSELF BEFORE I ENLISTED CLIENTS IN THE FIELD TO DO THIS FOR THE FIRST TIME."

Krenek, a 14-year veteran of the construction business, started working with concrete forms a mere two years ago when he built his own home with ICFs. "I built my home to have it as a catalyst to show people."

After researching all the options, Krenek concluded that concrete fit his "extreme green focus" while providing both flexibility and permanence. He started construction on his own

home in Driftwood, Texas, in October of 2005. He engaged in doing the ICF work himself to learn how to work with subcontractors in the future. A year later, his family of seven had a new 5,000 square foot Texas Colonial house.

He has now revamped his entire business to promote the components of his extreme green philosophy: ICF construction, passive solar home design, reflective roofing, dual-fuel HVAC systems, and other energy-saving features like insulation, tankless water heaters, Energy Star appliances and fluorescent lighting. But while consumers are interested in learning about concrete construction, Krenek's current clients have been a bit slow on the uptake.

"People that are inexperienced with it think, 'oh, a concrete home, it's gonna look like a shopping mall.'" So rather than try to convince people by enumerating the benefits—reduced energy consumption and thereby cost, as well as comfort, permanence, and protection from the elements—Krenek set out to demonstrate concrete's superiority to traditional building. "You have your own home, you can just bring people any time you want to look at it, that's the real reason [he built the house]... you can show them that you can have your limestone house and have something different behind the wall structure."

The entire outside of Krenek's house is limestone quarried from nearby Jerrell, and the inside is dotted with native Texas woods. He tried to stick with indigenous materials in part to prove his point that you can have a traditional home with his extreme green concrete construction. For instance, porches are considered essential in temperate Texas. "Porches are something we can use for an extended period of time, we use them from March to December pretty much. But they also have the function to shield the sun off of all your windows, so it allows you to reduce the heat gain from your windows tremendously."

That passive solar home design is part of Krenek's holistic approach to extreme green home building. He tries to position homes he builds to utilize the sun's energy in the winter but to limit its impact in the summer. His new home is about 15 percent off of an optimal placement. Part of his penchant for the technical aspects of building stem from his engineering and IT








background: "my whole mindset is really more of an engineering-type mindset." His engineering career took him around the world, where he visited structures that had been in place for thousands upon thousands of years. "They incorporate concrete and stone in a tremendous amount of their construction ... It was a desire to emulate some of that," he says of his foray into concrete.

"My whole intent was to build a home that we'd love to live in, but that somebody else would like to live in too, ten or fifteen years down the road. It's kind of like in the old days, where so-and-so built the house and it's like, well, that's Bill Woolbarger's house, and everybody knows it for centuries as that house. That's what I wanted to do: 'Yeah, that's the Krenek house,' everybody knows about it."

Krenak reiterates that concrete construction isn't part of a green trend or fear of global warming. "It makes sense to do it anyway," he says, "because it's the right way to build a house that's permanent, that requires very little maintenance and overhead; and it provides so many extra benefits that it more than offsets the slight addition in cost it may incur on building the structure."

The Driftwood home will be a stop on this year's Christmas in the Hills Tour of Homes benefiting the Dripping Springs Community Library. Krenak is excited about that because it will be the first time there's been a house on the tour where the attention is focused on the house's construction rather than its decoration (though there will be ornaments aplenty). He continues, "From the perspective of living in a home, I have seen no disadvantages. After experiencing it and doing it, this is, in my mind, the only way to do my own home." 

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