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Home building to the nth degree

by Michael Catarevas
Managing Editor

You couldn't tell with just a drive-by, but the picturesque house at 25 Orchard Lane in New Canaan has a warmth to it unlike any other in town. What's more, it also boasts an undeniably unique cool factor.

Literally, on both counts, thanks to Salvatore Zarrella. The founder and owner of Construction Management Group (CMG), at 58 Pine St., working in conjunction with Stamford's Nuzzi Architects, utilized a state-of-the-art heating and cooling system that may very well revolutionize how new homes are constructed in the near future.

It is based on a radiant heating and cooling system with panels in ceilings, as opposed to floors. Over 20,000 homes have been built in Europe using ceiling panels, which perform both heating and cooling. California has a handful of houses with them, and the New Canaan house is the only other one in the United States to have been built with them.

"It is absolutely the wave of the future," said Zarrella. "Radiant heating in floors has dominated the radiant heating industry for a very long time and has been very effective at distributing heat. However, it has drawbacks compared to this 'new' approach. We did extensive research before endorsing and recommending the system to my client at 25 Orchard Lane.

"I must admit, I was a little nervous, but it is more successful than we could have imagined, and has been through both a heating and a cooling season, passing with flying colors. It has proven to be far superior to any system I have ever installed in new home construction projects."

The home building industry has taken notice. The 2014 HOBI (Home Builders & Remodelers Assn. of Conn.) Awards cited CMG for 'Best In-Town Custom Home' and 'Best New Construction Technology' for 25 Orchard Lane, validating not only Zarrella's forward-thinking heating/cooling mindset, but his artistic choices for the house as a whole.

The major advantage of ceiling panels is that they can be used for both heating and cooling rooms.

"Typical radiant heating (in floors) has been just that — heating," said Zarrella, 39. "A house with that requires a separate system for cooling. This means extensive, bulky ducts in addition to all the work that went into the radiant floor. If you want multiple zones, that means separate air handlers and separate equipment. It also means you need multiple compressors outside.

"The home here has one outdoor unit that handles both heating and cooling. Most 5,000+ sq.-ft. houses need more than that, sometimes three or four units. There are no air handlers in the house except for the system



providing fresh air to the house with minimal duct work, so no dust and allergens blowing at high velocity, creating discomfort. No summer cold air blowing above your head, especially when you're sleeping or curled up on a couch. In the winter, there's no blowing heated air around that smells like burnt dust."

No redundant heating and cooling systems means money saved and fewer equipment requirements. In the winter warm water is pushed through the radiant panels, and in the summer, through the same tubes, chilled water is pushed.



The New Canaan house at 25 Orchard Lane, top, features state-of-the-art radiant heating and cooling ceiling panels, above left. The kitchen ceiling, above, includes the panels imbedded as indicated, above right.

"And 25 Orchard Lane has one thermostat/sensor for every room; 21 total," said Zarrella. "That mean 21 individual rooms controlled independently, creating total control, something that is unheard of conventionally.

"A typical large house sometimes has two to four units outside to accommodate different zones in the house. This is unsightly and takes up lots of space, eating up a yard and zoning tolerances. Usually, the average house has a amaster bedroom zone and main bedroom zone on one air handler. The main floor is typically one zone, with another for the basement. You can easily have large temperature swings from one room to another, with little control."

Zarrella pointed out that not only are the ceiling panels more efficient, but they are less expensive to run (20-40%) than conventional forced-air systems, because water is far denser than air and holds more energy than air can. It requires less energy to distribute through a small circulating pump as compared to a fan inside the air handler (or usually multiple fans). As an example, if the temperature outside is 35 degrees, the water temperature usually meets the heating demand in a well-insulated house at 85-90 degrees running through the system. That's far less than what you find in a conventional forced hot air (140-

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Business briefs

Realty Guild adds pair

Barbara Cleary's Realty Guild has announced that Suzanne Green and Robert Avery have joined the firm.

Green, a resident of New Canaan for the past 28 years, has been active in numerous town, school and church activities. She is currently a volunteer for Staying Put, a volunteer-supported organization dedicated to giving local seniors the practical means and social support to live their lives to the fullest. She has been a realtor in New Canaan for the past 10 years. Prior to entering real estate, she was a teacher and private tutor.

Avery has been involved in real estate for many years, including owning and managing a 20-unit apartment building in Hoboken, N.J., and working in residential and commercial construction and home building. A member of the New York Yacht Club, Avery moved to New Canaan in 2000 and belongs to the Rotary Club and the Gridiron Club. He has two sons, presently attending Saxe Middle School. He is a member of the New Canaan Board of Realtors and New Canaan Multiple Listing Service.



Robert Avery



Suzanne Green

BHHS names top November exec in New Canaan

BHHS New England Properties is pleased to announce the top sales executive in the New Canaan Office. In November, honors went to PJ Taylor as the top selling agent.

"PJ has achieved tremendous success for her clients," stated Candace Adams, BHHS New England Properties' president and chief executive officer.

"We are fortunate to have such a high caliber of Realtors who exemplify our vision of providing the best service available."



PJ Taylor

Powell gets CFO post at Waveny

Shaun Powell has been appointed chief financial officer of Waveny LifeCare Network of New Canaan. In this role, Powell will manage all accounting functions, financial issues and fiscal reporting for Waveny LifeCare Network, which includes Waveny Care Center, The Village, The Inn, Waveny Home Healthcare, Waveny at Home, an Adult Day Program, the Brown Geriatric Evaluation Clinic and all of the other services and programs that comprise Waveny's continuum of healthcare.

"We are extremely pleased to have Shaun join Waveny as our chief financial officer,"



Shaun Powell

said Bill Piper, chief executive officer for Waveny. "His financial experience, especially in long-term care settings, will be a tremendous asset to our organization and will have an immediate, positive impact in propelling us forward."

Powell joins Waveny with nearly 15 years of professional experience in accounting and finance, including years of service within the long-term care field. With extensive expertise in financial analysis, budget development, audit preparation, cost reporting, forecasting and accounting oversight, Powell previously served as contract CFO, accounting con-

sultant, and controller.

He is a graduate of Colorado State University of Fort Collins, Colorado.

"I am very excited to join Waveny LifeCare Network and look forward to playing an active role in maintaining the exceptional quality of care that Waveny is known for," said Powell. "Having worked in skilled nursing and residential care settings over the past four years, I am eager to expand that focus to an entire non-profit continuum of care, especially given the ever-changing and evolving healthcare landscape."

Church & Bankwell join forces for charity

Friends and members of the New Canaan Congregational Church contributed significantly to the Bankwell collection of gifts and toys that Inspirica (formerly St. Luke's) of Stamford will distribute to needy children throughout Fairfield County this holiday season.

Shown are Bankwell branch manager Elizabeth Buzzee, left, congregant Beth Picard, director of missions & outreach Marianna Kilbride, and congregant Connie McManus.



Radiant

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160 degrees) system, and can be done with a very efficient heat source, like a heat pump, which is three times more efficient than a boiler.

Finally, since there are no air handlers in the background, it is a silent system.

"Thanks to EU Systems (radiant cooling and heating specialist) and Messana North America (radiant panel manufacturer), radiant cooling and heating is a revolutionary

approach that can change the way new homes are cooled and heated."

Zarella, 39, lives in Stamford with his wife, Rebecca, and their one-year-old son. His company does a lot of work in New Canaan. It was the general contractor for the St. Aloysius Church construction and renovation, as well as the firm doing the renovation work at the United Methodist Church.

Zarella was raised in a family that included a large number of builders, and built his first home at age 22. He has a diverse background, with extensive hands-on

experience in many of the trades. A skilled mill worker and finish carpenter as well as an experienced marble and granite stone fabricator, Zarella's model for craftsmanship comes from the European 'old-world' time-tested methods.

"I watch so many homes built in our area that make me cringe when I see the way they are assembled," he said. "Lots of bad technique and habits. But sometimes just plain ignorance."

Along with backing the new radiant heating and cooling system, his firm is involved in the planning of a new home construction in Ridgefield using the 'passive house' model, a German standard based on an extremely well insulated and virtually airtight building that is primarily heated by passive solar gain through the windows.

"These passive houses are typically 85-90% more efficient than the standard U.S. code-built homes, making them the most efficient buildings in the world.

"We're hard at work to increase awareness that it is economically possible and feasible to create homes of any style desired that will produce more energy than they consume."

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HOME INSPECTIONS by PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS

Talking Radon in Air

What is it?

By now you have probably heard of the naturally occurring invisible, odorless radioactive soil gas called radon that seeps up out of the ground in parts of this country. Like other areas of the U.S., the Northeast is susceptible to this problem.

What is wrong with it?

If the house is located over high radon soil or rock, then unacceptable levels of radon may accumulate in the house. High enough exposure to radon for long enough periods of time increases one's chance of getting lung cancer.

What do I do when buying a house?

Have a screening test for radon in air performed. This should tell you if the radon level in the house you are buying is low, high or borderline. Most Home Inspectors can administer this radon test for you.

Since radon in air levels vary substantially from hour to hour, day to day and season to season for various reasons, do not

think of your test results as a hard number. These are screening tests.

Radon mitigation systems are available (at a usual cost of around \$1000) for houses with high readings. System are often installed at houses with borderline readings at the discretion of the people involved. There may already be a system present at the house you are considering.

What do I do when I own the house?

Live normally and enjoy the home. While the actual radon level will fluctuate up and down over time, chances are there will not be a systematic trend toward more or less radon. Nevertheless, retesting every few years might be best.

If you have a radon mitigation system, check the built-in monitor from the time to time to make sure the system continues to operate. It would also be prudent to test the radon level in the house every few years to make sure the system's operation remains effective.



Peter Seirup, P.E.



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