



Warm Up the Great Indoors with a Little Help from Your Friends

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHY NICOLETTE TOUSSAINT

One of the funnier memories I have from childhood is an image of my three brothers playing pool while wearing mittens. The ski cabin my family rented in Silver Plume came complete with a small coal heater in the living room, ice-encrusted windows and a pool table. Like my hearty neighbor kids here in Carbondale, some of whom run barefoot in the snow, my brothers were not about to let a six-below chill get in the way of an eight ball in the corner pocket!

However, I moved back home from California in 2011 with some trepidation. When my husband and I first viewed the house we now own, it was September. It looked dark and gloomy, and I could already feel cold seeping through the floor. Worried, I wondered whether I still remembered how to change clothes while remaining wholly cocooned inside a down sleeping bag.

I'm pleased to say that, these days, neither in-the-bag dressing skills nor mittened pool shots are necessary. Several Roaring Fork Valley organizations will be happy to lend a hand—and even hand you a check—to help you make your great indoors stay cozy while outdoors is frosty and covered with snow.

During the purchase of our home, we discovered that previous owners had been spending more than \$250 a month for electricity. We were not interested in (to co-opt my mother's old phrase) "heating half the state," so we commissioned an energy assessment, an air blower test and thermal imaging. I have a green building background, and I already knew what the photos (orange and purple images above right) would show: Heat always leaks out of uninsulated roofs and floors, old-style single-paned windows and holes in the walls.

We asked a contractor to add weather-stripping where the thermal images showed heat escaping around the existing insulation, light fixtures and wall trim. He added insulation and a moisture barrier to the crawl space and sealed an old dog door. We painted the dark interiors a light-reflecting ivory. The difference was immediate; the house felt much warmer from the day we moved in, and it also looked sunny.

When we first saw the house, it was decked out with a lime green entrance, black interior doors and curtains, dark brown trim and a navy blue wall in the dining room. That wall gave me the blues! It sat adjacent to the patio doors on the home's south wall—our major source of interior light. The dark surface sucked the light out of both the dining room and the open, adjacent living room.

We repainted the home's entire interior a warm white—the color is Sherwin Williams' "Downey"—and placed a large Talavera mirror on the dining room wall. A white wall reflects as much light as a mirror. Reflectiveness of a surface is calibrated by instruments that measure its "albedo." A surface that reflects no light has an albedo of zero and one that reflects all available light has an albedo of one. Both mirrors and white walls have an albedo close to one. You can see the difference the color change made in the before and after photos on page 24; compare the large dining room photo with the "before" shot at top right.

During the first year of "greening up" our pumpkin-colored house, we spent \$350 for an energy audit, plus \$7,181 for insulating

projects. Our contractor upped our home's insulation rating—its "R value"—from 30 to the recommended 38, and we saw our electric bill drop about 20 percent from the previous owner's total. We also received \$800 in rebates with the help of Clean Energy Economy for the Region (CLEER).

But for the next year, we lived with windows that were slightly worse than awful. Old creaky cranks would move the bedroom panes, but the windows' warped frames wouldn't latch. Although I tacked a rope to the bathroom window so I could pull it closed without going outside to give it a push, *we* needed a push, a motivator to prompt us to tackle the big window replacement project.

When I happened by a CLEER booth at a summer concert in Glenwood, I stopped to thank them for their help with the rebates—and learned, to my surprise, that we were eligible for additional funds for window upgrades. Last spring, we purchased new, state-of-the-art, energy-efficient Anderson Renewal windows. We invested \$5,311, received another \$600 rebate from Garfield Clean Energy, and clipped another 20 percent off our electric bill.

During last summer's hottest days, we easily kept the house at 75 degrees without air conditioning. Now, with the winter's first snow lying on the ground, I'm happy to report that we're pink and warm inside our pumpkin-colored house, enjoying the great indoors.

Sculpture by Dahl

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