

Craig Wolfe: artist and crusader

By Ann Wilke

Craig Wolfe is a home builder. To the profession he entered four years ago, Wolfe brings an unusual mix — the soul of an artist, the craft of a mathematician, the spirit of a crusader.

Those who work at a thing are of three types, Wolfe says: workers — who are content to punch the time clock, craftsmen — who care about their work and artists — those who seek to make a statement in what they do.

He seeks to make a statement, one that is positive and appropriate to what "I believe is needed in housing."

That translates into houses that work with instead of against their environment — passive solar, earth contact, energy-saving homes. Wolfe is chairman of the SAVE tour of energy-saving homes sponsored this week by the Home Builders Association of Greater Kansas City. In that position — and in other volunteer and professional roles — he is an advocate of building today for tomorrow.

"The vision of people building houses today is going to be appreciated in the next century."

Wolfe wants to be one of the builders appreciated in 2050. He is a learner and his goal to increase and share his knowledge.

In developing what he calls prototypes of energy-efficient housing, Wolfe has devised a technique he calls the "Energy 1

Concept Home." This is a plan he has built that combines earth contact, super insulation, a super anti-infiltration package and passive solar principles. In construction of this house, he uses two walls with a vapor barrier between them; each is stuffed with fiberglass batts and rigid insulation is on the outside of the second wall. On windows he uses Window Quilts, an insulated rolling shade that reduces heat loss in the winter and shades glass in the summer.

A passive solar home he built using his "Energy 1 Concept" techniques for a Lenexa family has been tested by performance. The back-up heating system in the 1,568-square-foot house consisted of four small electric baseboard units. The total electric heating bill for the cold winter of December 1, 1981 through March 1, 1982 was \$110. That was without using the home's woodburning stove.

Since Wolfe started building in 1978, he has built seven custom houses and some greenhouse additions, mostly in Johnson County.

The home building career started for Craig Wolfe with the building of his own house on two woody acres in western Kansas City, Kansas. At the time he was earning his living as a musician, part of the Amdahl-Wolfe group. That career had developed from his experience working his way

through the University of Kansas playing guitar and writing songs. When he received a degree in business administration from KU, he decided to continue his career in music.

The group was well-known in greater Kansas City through the 1970s. Then, in 1978, while Wolfe was in the middle of building a passive solar log house for himself, the group dispersed.

Wolfe spends a great deal of time on the design and construction of the houses he builds.

He has been an active member of the Missouri Solar & Energy Associates — Kansas City Chapter (a non-profit energy education group) and is the chairman of its board. He is busy now preparing for "A 'New Worlds' Fair: Alternatives for Tomorrow," and all day event co-sponsored by the MSEA on March 12 at Penn Valley Community College. He was vice-chairman of the Mid-America Cooling Conference, an instructor for the University of Missouri's passive solar and earth contact course, a speaker at the RFK Energy Symposium at UMKC, a speaker at the HBA-MSEA 1981 Performance and Design Conference.

Meanwhile, Wolfe continues to write music, to study, to design. When he reads for pleasure, he leans toward the metaphysical authors — people like Jane Roberts or Carlos Castaneda. The songs he writes carry a message

sometimes literal, usually spiritual. So does his conversation.

"I believe the Universe has rules . . . that God is like a mountain with all the cultures living around it. One culture sees the slope, another the cliff, another the snow. The problems come when one walks around for a different view. The phenomenon of God is so rich that it needs all the cultures, all the views."

Wolfe grew up in Leawood. His father was western artist Byron Wolfe; his brother Wayne is an artist living today in Santa Fe.

"My father did not live to see Wayne's paintings or to see my houses — but somehow I think he's back there guiding us."



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