Birdland

The first time I saw Birdland I was not impressed. The view from Murrell Rd showed some clearing in the front, but the rest was all overgrown, undeveloped land. I had spent 9 months looking at parcels north of Houston ranging from Cut and Shoot all the way to Bellville. My realtor really wanted to show me a 10-acre parcel off Hegar Rd., so we did not spend much time at Birdland. I liked the 10-acre parcel and my wife and I drove out walk it the next day. We decided it was not for us. Almost as an afterthought I took her to Birdland. As we walked out on to the property, past the pipeline right of way, we were both overcome with a tremendous feeling of peacefulness and tranquility. I bought the acreage the very next day and have never regretted it. My wife and I sleep outside on the screened-in (yes, even under the floor) sleeping porch at least 10 months out of the year and wake up to the sun and birdsong.

I have spent the past 11 years clearing the property by hand. I have gone out of my way to preserve the big trees and turn Birdland into a park/wildlife sanctuary. In addition to the common wildlife like possums, racoons, armadillos and deer, there are 100+ species of birds that either nest on the property or migrate through. I have also seen some very uncommon wildlife while having breakfast and coffee on the dining porch. Three years ago in the spring I was having coffee in the morning and watched a jaguarundi lope by about 30 feet away (jaguarundis are wild cats about the size of a puma and are an endangered species in Texas – more common in Central and South America). Last January I was sitting on the dining porch at about 8:00 in the morning and heard animals snorting. It was our herd of 5 deer that live on the property chasing a Bobcat across the lawn, driving it away.

Construction at Birdland

My goal with building at Birdland was to design and build a truly energy efficient home.

The house and the bardominium at Birdland were build using SIPs (Structurally Integrated Panels). They are 4 - 8ft wide by 8 ft tall slabs of Styrofoam with 7/16” OSB plywood glued to each side. During construction they are fitted together, side-by-side and tilted up to make an exterior wall or roof. This type of construction is more expensive than a normal stick-built house, but SIP buildings are:

1) Exceptionally well insulated, without any exterior holes (stick-built houses have thousands of holes).
2) Exceptionally strong, capable of handling 150 mph winds - even a tree strike.

The walls of the barndominium were constructed from 4-inch panels (four inches of Styrofoam with 2X 7/16 plywood = wall thickness of 4 7/8 inches). The roof was constructed from 6” thick panels. The walls of both of the house cabins were made from 6-inch panels and the roofs from 8-inch thick panels. All the windows in both buildings are double-pane. In addition, the eaves on the south side of the house are wider than normal. During the summer, they shade the widows, not allowing the sunlight to stream inside and heat-up the house. During the winter, when the sun is lower in the sky and the sunlight is needed to help heat the house, the eaves allow the sun in. Between the exceptional insulation, and the 10Kw solar array on the roof of the house, our summertime electric bills for the entire place (house and barndominium) only amount to approximately $150 a month. I have friends who are paying $300-$500 a month for electricity.