

## The Long View

### "Green Building Here to Stay"

By Matt Hutchins

Construction is an inherently destructive process. All the materials that go into a house are milled, refined, or manufactured and in that process the original resource is depleted. The housing boom over the last few years has exposed critical shortages in cement, gypsum and lumber; consequently, prices for almost all construction materials have been driven up. These shortages, coupled with the increasing prices for energy to heat and cool homes, force us as builders to question the way we produce houses.

Sustainable building practices offer a solution. Design and construction with high energy performance, low water usage, and the efficient use of environmentally responsible, and less toxic materials, is sweeping the nation. Initially the cause of a few hard-core environmentalists, sustainable building is being embraced by the media, pragmatists within the industry and increasingly, homeowners. Several national programs, such as LEED through the U.S. Green Building Council ([www.usbc.org](http://www.usbc.org)) have been very successful in marketing green building and it is quickly becoming the standard for civic and commercial projects.

Now the effort is trickling down to the home market. Industry voices such as the N.A.H.B. and the M.B.A. have developed guidelines and resources to help builders shift their building practices. Manufacturers are certainly listening and developing new materials that can be certified green without the additional markup that used to stigmatize these products. Right now sustainable building is an added value, but soon it will be an expectation for all quality home construction.

If you want to start going green, the M.B.A.'s Built Green™ program ([www.built-green.net](http://www.built-green.net)), is a solid start. You will find on its website a compilation of case studies, material resources, and a 5-Star program to certify homes based on their environmental friendliness. As a member, I find the program easy to use, and the checklists provided enable our company to make better choices in obtaining the finest products, with the best value, for each project's budget. And, since joining last year, we have received close to twenty leads from being on


the member list alone; this makes the cost of joining well worth it.

For alternative building materials, especially finishes such as flooring, paint, countertops, and decking, I turn to the Environmental Home Center ([www.environmentalhomecenter.com](http://www.environmentalhomecenter.com)), and also the GreenSpec Directory, available through [BuildingGreen.com](http://BuildingGreen.com). For more information, *Environmental Building News* is a quick read, and thorough.

The Northwest EcoBuilding Guild, with local chapters throughout Washington and Oregon and made up of builders, designers,

tradespeople and suppliers, is a great forum to share experiences and expertise with others in the industry who are interested in sustainable design.

While still in its infancy, sustainable building is going to revolutionize construction in the next generation as natural resources become scarcer and homeowners demand higher performance and more responsible building. It is fast becoming not a question of whether you can afford to go green, but whether you can afford not to.

*Matt Hutchins is a principal at CAST Design/Build, Inc., based in Seattle. *



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