



## Building Success 101

Q: The "green" benefit: Building vs Remodeling

A: Building a new house affords you the opportunity to consider the entire house with a systematic, comprehensive approach to energy efficiency, indoor air quality, and overall performance. While improvements to an existing home may make a partial dent in that structure's energy use (perhaps in one portion of the house), a new home built to high environmental standards will be far more efficient and perform better because the whole house benefits from better building materials and methods than those of the past.

## Green Building: What it is and why it matters

"Green building" is the latest media buzz about the construction industry. As professional builders, we welcome the attention brought to this important topic. We take these with a grain of salt, however, because green building is a far more complex issue than that portrayed in the media. News spots or magazine articles usually focus on insulated windows, high-efficiency furnaces, roof-mounted solar panels, or recycled-content flooring.

Certainly, those products provide measurable benefits in terms of energy savings and improved use of natural resources, but genuine green building is much more complex. A green *builder* uses a systematic approach to design, construction, and on-going operational durability in which the sum of the benefits are far greater than the individual components. A green builder also knows how to personalize the green building approach to each homebuyer's needs and budget, carefully balancing the value that the client places on the benefits of green building as opposed to other choices available for new home construction.

It is true that all homes (and all *buildings*) leave an environmental "footprint." The materials we builders use in new construction use natural resources, such as trees and metal ores, even oil. The important goals of green building are to reduce the amount of natural resources required to *build* a house, and then to lessen the amount of energy used *by* the house. Energy efficiency over the life of the house further reduces the natural resources needed to produce electricity and natural gas.

To achieve those goals, we look for building materials, products, and systems that make the most (or best) use of every resource harvested while also performing better than traditional products. For example, an engineered beam uses smaller, fast-growing trees. Twice as much of each log can be used to make an engineered beam as compared with a comparably sized "glue-lam" beam created in a sawmill. An engineered beam can also span longer, open spaces and resist warp better. A house that is free of even the smallest gaps does not waste energy.

Various green building certification programs are now available to help builders create more sustainable and resource-efficient homes. As we review them, however, we often find that the building practices we already have in place meet or exceed those standards. That's good news for our homebuyers and owners because it means we're already providing a high-performance home -- i.e., a home with many green features -- without adding to the cost or price. Of course, a client may choose to add additional features as budget, needs, and passion for the environment dictate.

I have said many times to clients that the homes we build are more than basic shelter. They are a reflection of who we are and what we have accomplished.

I think this quote from Susan Susanka's book "The Not So Big Life" also helps us understand what "home" is.

"Although we normally associate the word 'home' with a place that's built out of bricks and mortar or studs and siding, in fact house is much more than that. It is a feeling and a way of being in one's life rather than any specific place."

With a systematic approach to green or sustainable building, we can build a new home that not only leaves as small an environmental footprint as possible, but also delivers convenience, comfort, safety, and a high level of value.

We at Dickson Development are embracing the concepts of green building in both our new construction and renovation work. Working together with our staff, trade partners, architects, engineers and clients we are incorporating features that reflect the goals of "green building."

Warm regards,

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