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A Tradition of Innovative Quality Construction

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## 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, sustainability and high-performance homes are now part of the vocabulary of new home construction. We welcome the attention brought to these important issues. As professional builders, however, we take the subject with a grain of salt. Green building is a far more complex topic than that portrayed in the media. News spots or magazine articles typically focus on specific areas like 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. The National Association of Home Builders offers a continuing education program of coursework that leads to achieving certification as a Certified Green Building Professional. In 2008 I completed this program and received my certification.

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.

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.

Warm regards,

*Richard*

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