



Practical Green

BUILDING SUCCESS 101

Q: Why not guarantee energy savings?

A: There are some builders and green building certification programs that will guarantee a certain amount of energy use or cost savings for a new home and provide rebates if those results fall short. For the most part, however, energy saving is very difficult to calculate and predict, as it depends on the baseline (what you might use/spend in a non-green home), local energy rates, and the behavior of the occupants, to name a few variables.

Green building is certainly a hot topic these days. For builders striving to reduce the environmental footprints of the homes they build, the process encompasses a wide range of materials, products and systems.

But does building green really mean anything to you as a homebuyer? You may recognize and perhaps even appreciate seeing the Energy Star label on windows and appliances, but what's the tangible benefit of recycled-content drywall or certified wood doors to your daily life ... and your pocketbook?

As a professional builder who is ready and able to respond to what our homebuyers want -- including homes with better energy efficiency and indoor air quality -- we also recognize that buyers need to see how our efforts impact them personally.

To that end, we strive to educate our clients about the various "green building" methods and materials we employ. Along with contributing to our planet, we approach this from the perspective of the practical benefits to our owners and their families.

Hidden Gems. The bulk of a comprehensive green building effort happens behind the finishes. Instead of touting the R-value of the attic insulation or the solar heat gain coefficient of the windows, we talk about comfort: no more drafty feelings by windows and doors; no more temperature differences between floors or rooms; the ability to walk around in your bare feet. Those benefits seem to resonate far better than any technical information.

Easy Recycling. We not only want to encourage but also help facilitate recycling household waste. So we increasingly provide convenient bins within the kitchen and laundry cabinets to make it easier to collect those items and get them to the curb and out of the landfill.

In that same vein, we have also installed handy compost bins in the kitchen to collect vegetable clippings and other organic matter that can be

added to a larger compost pile or collector outside and used to improve soil for a vegetable or flower garden -- allowing homebuyers to extend an interest in local produce and organic foods.

Breathe Easier. To help save energy and boost indoor comfort, green builders often use non-toxic paints, flooring, and other interior finishes -- as well as ventilation systems -- that improve the quality of the indoor air.

Rather than explore the world of vent fans and semi-gloss paint, we often phrase our efforts in terms that address allergies, respiratory problems, and other sensitivities that our homebuyers might suffer ... and will appreciate not having in their new homes.

Future Green: Monitors and Electric Cars. While certainly not mainstream, in-home computer programs that allow homeowners to see and adjust their use of energy and water are great visual reminders of green building efforts that also help to optimize them.

Similarly, we've seen electric car chargers that run on the home's electrical service (or even solar energy) that can accommodate all-electric or hybrid cars, allowing homeowners to conveniently serve that investment in sustainable living.

The bottom line is that builders often get caught up in the details and technical specs of green building; professional builders understand that to be truly beneficial, those efforts have to improve the quality of everyday life.

Warm regards,

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