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# GOLFERS

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## How to build a green home

by: Scott Rodwin, AIA, LEED AP

If you're interested in buying, building or renovating a home in Boulder, you have probably heard about "green building", but you might not be clear as to what this means. In general it refers to homes that have lower energy and water bills, are thermally more comfortable, have better indoor air quality, great natural daylighting and make use of environmentally friendly materials. In Boulder, green building has become the industry standard due to building code requirements, market demand and an array of financial incentives.

**"I'd like to remodel or build a new home. Where do I start?"** Find yourself an experienced team of local professionals. The Boulder Green Building Guild ([www.bbg.org](http://www.bbg.org)) is a great place to find all the help you need. For small projects, many people choose to work directly with a builder or individual tradesmen. For larger projects, homeowners generally start by selecting a licensed Architect.

**"I just want to do an energy efficiency upgrade on my home - I've heard there are County programs in Boulder to help me."** Yes, go to [www.energysmarties.com](http://www.energysmarties.com) to learn about this streamlined and subsidized program, which provides an energy audit of your home, a list of recommended upgrades, tax credits & rebates, and one-stop-shopping for basic energy retrofit services.

**"Everybody is talking about HERS ratings. What's that?"** It's like an M.P.G. rating for your house. The lower the better. A score of 100 means your house is using 100% of the energy that a new national code-compliant home of the same size would. 50 means you're using half, and living in a very green home. 200 means you're living in a leaky tent, and 0 means you're using no energy from the grid at all. While Net-Zero energy houses are still very rare, they are becoming increasingly possible. The scores are generated by a HERS rater who inspects your house. HERS ratings are becoming popular as a sales tool and are now an optional category on the MLS real estate listings in Boulder.

**"What are some of the most important things to consider?"** While every home is different, and every homeowner has unique priorities, the following are good places to start:

- **Passive solar design** – this means capturing the right amount of sun in the right ways. This is controlled by the size, placement and selection of windows, and their protection from overheating by carefully designed overhangs.

- **Thermal envelope** – A typical home can reduce its utility bill roughly 30% just by weatherizing and air sealing. Additionally, adding insulation and upgrading the windows can dramatically improve the comfort and utility bills of most houses. Note that as you seal up a home tighter, it is critically important to pay attention to the products that a home is made of. Building materials can off-gas dangerous quantities of toxic substances; many people have their health compromised by poor indoor air quality.

- **Energy Star lighting and appliances** – These energy efficient devices not only lower your utility bills, but also come with Federal tax incentives.

- **Low water use plumbing fixtures and landscaping** – EPA Watersense labeled plumbing fixtures help you meet local requirements. And Xeric (drought-tolerant native plants) landscaping can help you save even more water.

- **Renewable energy** – Boulder's 300 days of sun a year make this one of the best places in the country to invest in solar electric (photovoltaic) and solar thermal (hot water) energy. There are still huge financial incentives from Xcel and the Federal Government, but act soon as they are getting progressively smaller.

A "green" home is simply a better built home, and with today's low interest rates and construction costs, it's a great time to create your own.

Scott Rodwin, AIA, LEED AP is the President of Rodwin Architecture ([www.rodwinarch.com](http://www.rodwinarch.com)) an award-winning green design/build company, specializing in custom homes in Boulder County.



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