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The Green Home Building Business: A Primer for Those Just Entering the Market

Posted by **Joyanna Laughlin, Guest Columnist**

May 10, 2015 6:03:00 AM

Green homes are the shelter of the future. It's that simple.

The market for green home building is expected to reach \$83 to \$105 billion in 2016, up from \$36 billion in 2013, according to a 2014 McGraw Hill Construction report.

Does building green homes truly make a difference with homeowners? While it depends on where you live, 60 percent of consumers said they want energy-efficient amenities in their next home, according to a 2011 U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) survey. Another study found that, between 2007 and early 2012, homes in California with a green certification label had a nine percent higher value on average than similar, non-certified homes.

Tax rebates are essential to selling green homes. Make sure you are well versed in the rebates and tax credits available in your region. A good place to start is this [federal listing of credits](#), but most states have additional credits. You'll have to hunt those down. For example, North Carolina posts theirs [here](#):

There are numerous reasons to build green homes. For this piece, I spoke to several Boulder, CO, based experts, including Scott Rodwin, president of Rodwin Architecture and Brandon David, Assoc. AIA and VP at Rodwin, along with George Watt, principal of George Watt Architecture. They suggested four reasons now is the time for homebuilders and remodelers to jump on the green bandwagon:



1. It can help to **differentiate** you from the competition.
2. While some building codes do require energy-efficient homes, it ultimately **adds value** for the homeowner. “It means lower energy bills, a more thermally comfortable space, healthier indoor air quality, and the feeling that you’re helping make a more sustainable world for your kids,” Rodwin said.
3. It’s **hot**. “While green building costs more, and it takes more time and effort to design and engineer, it is where the industry is moving, so you can learn it now or learn it later,” Rodwin said.
4. It can **educate** the masses. Watt’s firm continually analyzes building system performance and materials to minimize carbon footprint and emissions of its projects. The reason some customers don’t seem to care about green is that they’re not aware of the the health, comfort and money-saving advantages. Once they buy in, they’ll be part of the environmental solution without feeling like they compromised.

Do the Math for Your Customers

If you have decided to build green, it’s important to help clients prioritize the green features that give the most bang for the buck. Adding extra insulation, a **more efficient HVAC system**, double or triple pane low-E windows, **no-VOC paints**, **LED lighting**, passive solar orientation and **recycled materials** whenever possible will add only a small amount to the cost to build, but will account for a large percentage of the improvement over a typical house. It is the 'last 10 percent' to make a house extra green, off the grid, or net-zero that really adds to the cost.

Take advantage of the steps you can take to increase the sustainable quotient that don’t cost any money. For example, siting for **passive solar gain** and **prevailing breezes**, controlling runoff or **collecting rainwater**, and reducing the need for hard impervious paving are all steps that cost very little.

Some energy-efficient and green building features that help sell homes include:

- **Low Home Energy Rating System (HERS) scores.** “These scores are as important to our buyers as high mpg is to car buyers,” Rodwin says. It’s also likely that realtors will soon begin listing HERS scores for resale of homes. This will have a major impact on the future value of a home. Green will literally translate into green.
- **Solar.** “**Solar panels** are highly valued,” David says. “And the current payback period has dropped to approximately 12 years (this varies depending on federal, state and local incentive programs)—after which the panels are just money in the bank.”
- **Indoor air quality.** Healthy **indoor air quality** is important to our buyers, especially those with children. Become an expert and keep toxins out of spaces by avoiding carpets, install smart ventilation and learning which products take IAQ seriously.
- **High-quality windows.** High-quality windows create a more thermally comfortable space—which may be their biggest appeal for homeowners. And of course, they’ll also save them energy and money. Some types protect rugs and furnishings from UV damage.
- **Energy-efficient wall, roof and mechanical systems.** “These won’t change over time, and it’s the least expensive place to put your money vis-à-vis energy efficiency,” Watt says. Take a look at newer systems such as heat pumps, high SEER boilers, and on-demand hot water.
- **Natural daylight.** Creating more natural daylight inside the home means the homeowner uses less energy to power interior lighting, But daylighting also makes homes more pleasant and an easy sell.
- **Intelligent Siting.** Make sure that the home is oriented properly and responds appropriately to the climate.
- **Net-zero energy.** Net zero refers to a home that produces as much energy on site as it requires for operation. The more efficient the home, the smaller the demand for energy, so put the money into the shell and you’ll be better served than creating a giant solar array to feed inefficient air conditioning.

As homebuyers continue to ask for more sustainable homes, building green just makes sense.

Joyanna Laughlin has written about green building/sustainable development, energy efficiency, solar/renewable energy, remodeling, home and lifestyle topics and natural products for more than 15 years.

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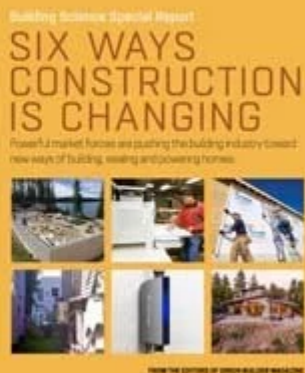
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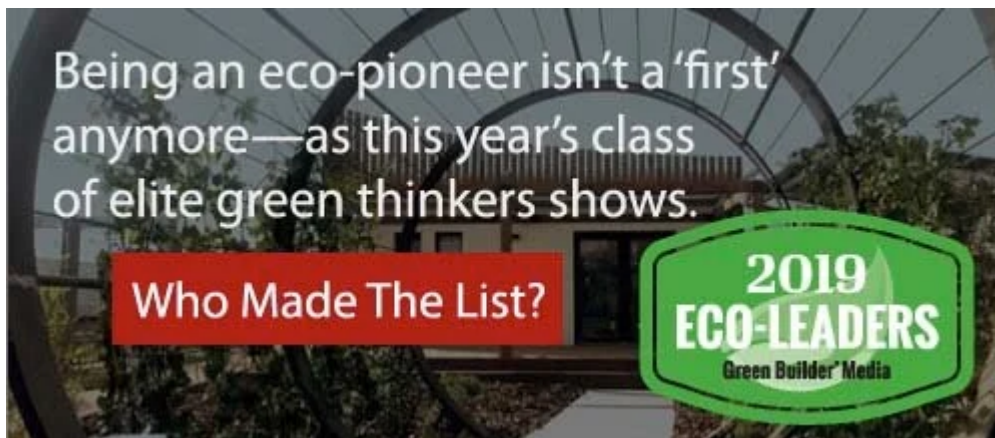
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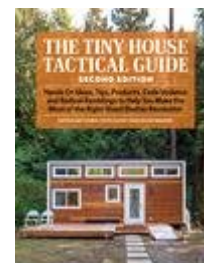
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