

'Green House' Movement Catching On With Home Buyers and Sellers

By Val Cook-Watkins

Environmentally friendly, energy efficient homes have been around for years, but until recently, these "green" homes have amounted to little more than a niche market in real estate. Now there are signs that the green movement is finally making inroads into the mainstream housing market.

One of the reasons green building and remodeling techniques are catching on, experts say, is that developers and homeowners have discovered that there are financial advantages to going green, in addition to the benefits of helping to protect the environment.

What makes a home "green?" According to the National Association of Realtors, the term "green building" refers to construction or remodeling practices that increase a home's performance and enhance the health and experience of those who live in it. Among other things, a green home saves energy and water, reduces material use, minimizes waste, uses low-impact materials, and makes the building healthier.

A recent survey by Green Builder Media revealed that a growing number of homebuyers want to purchase environmentally friendly, green-built homes and are willing to pay a premium to do so.

The survey of 250 residential builders across the United States reported that 80 percent of their buyers said they preferred to purchase homes that incorporate sustainable or energy-efficient features. Of those buyers, half said they would be willing to pay 11-25 percent more for green-built homes. In the health-conscious Bay Area, those numbers may be even higher.

Not surprisingly, developers are responding to the demand. About 96 percent of the homebuilders surveyed reported that they intend to incorporate more green building materials and processes into their business in 2007.

"This shift in behavior and purchasing patterns confirms just how sig-



Energy-efficient windows being installed
Photo provided by Kattenburg Architects



Val Cook-Watkins, Manager of Coldwell Banker Northern California's Orinda office, provides the above tips. A 25-year real estate veteran, Watkins oversees a talented team of 78 real estate professionals in the East Bay.

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nificant the green building movement is," said Sara Gutterman, CEO of Green Builder Media. "Builders are buying green products because they feel it's important to both the environment and their businesses."

Existing homeowners are also discovering that home makeovers that incorporate green techniques can make their properties stand out from the crowd, commanding higher prices in this market.

If you are thinking about going green, the following tips from NAR can help you make the most of your "green house" makeover:

- Maximize natural daylight and passive ventilation. Daylight makes a dramatic difference. In addition to making you feel better, daylighting can cut down on electric bills. Well-placed operable windows circulate fresh air throughout your home.
- Choose deconstruction and construction site recycling. The demolition debris from a typical kitchen or bathroom remodel equals four years of curbside recycling for the average household. Minimize the impact of your project by keeping reusable and recyclable materials out of the landfill, which will save costs, too.
- Weatherize your home. Adding insulation and new, energy efficient windows to an older home not only saves money in fuel costs, it improves comfort year-round.
- Buy energy-efficient kitchen appliances, furnace and water heater. All appliances with an "Energy Star" rating are a good choice. Many of these energy-efficient products qualify for a federal tax credit. Check with your tax advisor for more information.
- Choose water-efficient fixtures. Toilet flushing, showers and faucets account for 60 percent of all indoor water use. Installing efficient toilets, faucets and showerheads can save a typical household up to \$200 annually in water and energy bills.
- Use solvent free or low-emission paint. Low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint will make painting a healthier experience by minimizing the chemical fumes in your home.
- Choose formaldehyde-free products. You may not realize it, but formaldehyde, a suspected carcinogen, is commonly found in some carpet, cabinetry, insulation and other building products. Consider installing a hard surface floor instead of carpet, or install a green-rated carpet.
- Buy used, recycled, certified or re-graded wood products. Certified wood products are cut from sustainably managed forests. A growing number of stores are carrying these products, and they will have a seal that helps identify them.
- Harvest your rainwater for irrigation and toilet flushing. A well-designed rainwater harvesting system that captures rainwater from rooftops for use in irrigation and toilet flushing can cut annual water consumption by up to 50 percent.
- Landscape using native and drought-tolerant plants. Native plants are naturally adapted to our environment, so they require minimal care and watering and provide valuable habitat for birds and wildlife.

Improving the energy efficiency and sustainability of your home will not only help our fragile environment, but also increase the value of your number one asset – and save you some green in the process.



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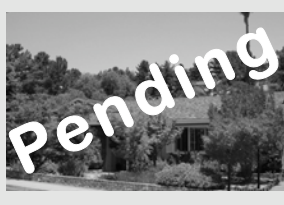


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