



Builder's 'green' home an example


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You CAN build a spacious house with comfy amenities that is also eco-friendly. That's what architect/builder Bill Styczynski will show builders in the demonstration house he is building in Downers Grove.

The two-story, 4,200-square-foot house is serving as a living laboratory for members of the Home Builders Association of Greater Chicago while it is under construction.

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After it is completed, it will be open to the public as part of the Chicago Luxury Home Tour (www.chicagohometour.com) in September. After that, it will become the Styczynski family's home.

"A house doesn't have to have a sod roof to be green," says Styczynski.

"This house will show builders and homeowners how you can make green choices."

In addition to being president of Styczynski Walker & Associates in Willowbrook, Styczynski is president of the HBAGC's Custom Builders Council.

Q. Is it true that Midwestern builders are slower to adopt green products and methods than those on the coasts or is this a myth?

A. I think it's true. We are conservative here. But the HBAGC is working to educate its members to change that. We are forming a green-building committee to educate both builders and the public about how to build green houses.

Then we hope to establish a third-party rating system to review our green buildings so home buyers can know which builders are really building green and which ones are just saying so. Michigan has a great program that can serve as a model.

Q. A recent study by the National Association of Home Builders said that small (10 or fewer houses per year) builders are more likely to embrace green building than are larger builders. Why is this?

A. In large production home building, it's a numbers game. You choose the lowest-cost products. But small builders tend to be building custom or semicustom houses where the buyer is willing to pay for a green product that may cost more up front but will pay off in the long run. And the house is built to last 50 to 100 years.

Also, the small builder is more likely to be part of a builder-architect-buyer dialogue about green products.

Q. Why the reluctance among some builders and buyers to build green?

A. I think it is mostly because there is a myth that it costs a lot more. It doesn't. The products that do cost more are those that pay off with energy savings.

Q. How are you making the demo house green?

A. We are following the green-building guidelines from the NAHB, which are not as strict as LEED guidelines. The house will also meet Energy Star-certification requirements. This way, it is a realistic model to follow.

We started with the site, making sure the living spaces face south to take advantage of light. We used fiber-cement siding with a 50-year warranty; it wins NAHB points for durability.

We used blown-in insulation made of recycled newspaper, which not only makes the house well-insulated, but, as a side benefit, makes it quieter inside. The windows are triple-glazed.

Because the house is so tight, we were able to use only one heating, cooling and ventilation system instead of the two that would usually be used for a house this size. It is a five-zone system, so you don't heat the whole house to make one room warm. Lots of ceiling fans circulate the air.

We chose water-saving toilets and showerheads. All the appliances are Energy Star. The lights have dimmers to use less electricity. The wood products are from managed-growth forests. Most of the products are from a 500-mile radius to minimize transportation use. When we paint the house, we'll use low-VOC paints.

Part of the NAHB point system includes homeowner education. My family is pretty good about things like water use and recycling, but in this house we will also learn how to save energy with the new mechanical and electrical systems.

We're putting together a homeowners' manual that can be used as a template for other builders' houses.

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