

What makes a home green?

For some homeowners it's about healthy living. For others it's about caring for the environment. All share a desire to live harmoniously with their surroundings.



This Central Coast home features structural beams of Sargent Cypress and Douglas Fir harvested from fire-damaged trees on-site. Straw bale walls provide thermal and sound insulation. Passive solar provides 95% of heating and 100% of cooling. (Below) Straw bale walls are more fire resistant than conventional walls and offer more than twice the insulation.

why build green?

1. MORE MONEY IN THE PIGGY BANK

A green home typically saves money on operating costs because of more efficient energy use, incorporating such features as extra insulation, more efficient water heaters, lighting and appliances, and the use of natural daylighting techniques. And many green features save money on construction costs.

2. HEALTHIER INDOOR AIR

Most paints and other finishes, glues, treated wood products, carpeting and padding contain harmful chemicals and compounds. Less toxic alternatives include low-toxic paints and finishes or natural pigments (which are generally non-toxic); carpeting that is tacked instead of glued with adhesives that continue to emit fumes over time; solid wood instead of formaldehyde-laden particleboard; and radiant heating, which does not circulate air and thereby reduces airborne particles.

3. SAFER AND LONGER-LASTING

Many green materials outlast their conventional equivalents: a bamboo floor is more moisture resistant and less prone to warping, swelling and shrinking than hardwood; earth walls are fireproof and highly resistant to termites and other insects; and recycled composite decking made from recycled plastic and wood waste doesn't require staining, sealing or pressure washing and doesn't splinter or crack.

4. PRESERVATION OF OLD-GROWTH FORESTS

Rapidly renewable materials such as bamboo, wheatgrass, cork and strawboard can be managed, grown and harvested in a sustainable way and can replace lumber from old-growth trees. Engineered lumber uses smaller pieces of fast-growing wood to obtain the same sizes and higher strengths as lumber milled from large old-growth forests. Plastic lumber made from recycled plastic can also be used for decking, sills and siding. And reclaimed/recycled wood has a beauty and patina that can only come with age. It is also available in species and cuts that are difficult to find in new wood.

5. WATER CONSERVATION

Installing drought tolerant or native plants (and less lawn) in landscaped areas conserves water. Porous paving in driveways and walkways allows rainwater to seep into the ground instead of running off. Erosion control methods help reduce sedimentation into streams, and natural features of a site can be protected. And irrigating with recycled water conserves fresh water (and can dramatically reduce water bills.)

6. LESS MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

Siding, decking and trim made from plastic lumber needs little or no painting. Durable materials such as stone, tile and slate last longer and therefore need replacement less often.

THE TOP 10 REASONS FOR BUILDING GREEN

7. DRAFT REDUCTION

A home can be sealed with advanced caulking that goes beyond basic practice. Typically, exterior walls are caulked around windows and doorframes, and on interior walls where they intersect with exterior ceilings.

8. HEALTHIER YARD

During construction, the topsoil that is removed for grading can be stockpiled and later reapplied to the site for healthier soils. Soil amendments such as compost can be added to further promote good soil for plantings.

9. REDUCED FOSSIL FUEL DEPENDENCE AND POLLUTION

Using local materials whenever possible reduces the cost, energy use and pollution that result from transporting materials long distances. It also helps local economies by increasing jobs and keeping cashflows and tax revenues in the community.

10. LESS TRASH

Green builders and remodelers recycle as much as possible of scrap building materials such as lumber, wallboard, concrete, cardboard and packaging. They can also incorporate many materials that contain recycled content or have been salvaged. This helps reduce the amount of material going to our already overburdened landfills.



WHERE TO START

The Santa Barbara Contractors Association, with its Built Green program, helps health-conscious, environmentally concerned homeowners practice earth-friendly living. The member companies of Built Green include contractors, builders and sub-contractors, architects and local governments. Visit www.builtgreensb.org or call 805 259 5005.

