

The Emerging Green Building Movement in Residential Real Estate

NAHB™ National Green Building Program, the NCBA™, and International EcoBroker™ Certification

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I became a residential real estate agent in 2005, and having come from a “green” marketing background, had my eye on the emerging markets of Green Home builders from the moment I became licensed in the home of 10,000 lakes in the state of Minnesota.

As fate would have it, I was lucky to have the opportunity to go deeply “green” with the state’s foremost ICF builder, Kyle Smith of www.E3Homes.biz in the summer of ’06. His ICF home offering in Orono, MN was on the 2006 Spring Luxury Home Tour, at about 85% completion, allowing myself and other interested parties the chance to see some of the raw components of a geothermal and concrete built home. He and his knowledgeable staff used the incomplete project as talking points that helped bridge our understanding of this unique offering out of the dark and into the light of reality.

The fact that the home spanned nearly 13,000 finished square feet, makes the term “Green Built” a tad oxymoronic; and yet its attention to detail in every design aspect made this home one that you could easily navigate past sheer volume and size and witness its commitment to eco-friendly principles: Grass cloth wall coverings, natural stone, and prefinished wood floors; VOC free paints, natural fibers in rugs and furnishings, natural day-lighting; and permeable hard ground cover surrounding the home and driveway made for an interesting discussion amongst the green “gurus” of Minneapolis...

When I was later called to market the home I enthusiastically wrapped my arms around the mammoth project knowing that this kind of atypical listing would be both a challenge and an opportunity to educate the community at large about Green Building practices.

With a huge inventory of upper bracket homes on the market and a short supply of buyers, the real estate market’s absorption rate was 2+ years...fearing a long sales cycle, I invited two other agents to share in the listing’s expenses and rewards. Neither of them had any prior interest nor education with “green” economy and simply couldn’t find a reason to risk their time and money in a project that may well never sell... I mention this fact because I want to strongly encourage builders that use unique and emerging trends of energy efficient/green building design, to find a real estate *partner* who is knowledgeable and passionately interested in educating potential buyers about the value-added propositions of your product/home.

If there aren’t any “experts” in your area, consider developing classes for local real estate brokerage companies to effectively “teach the teacher” thereby evangelizing your product's local (real estate) sales agents. We all know the glazed look that comes over most people’s eyes when you start talking rapidly renewable, energy efficient, FSC woods, cradle to cradle theories etc...it’s your job to figure out ways in which to add a little sizzle to the conversation.

- Add visual props such as clear vases full of the original product source such as bamboo, cement, stone, etc. to make the facts jump off the page.
- Glitz up the granola look and feel that has been synonymous with what most of us consider “green”! There has never been more exciting eco-friendly, insulation choices, ICF, HVAC options, high-end finishes, surfaces, appliances, plumbing fixtures, or furnishings in the history of the world.

- Create success stories surrounded by options and facts. Take advantage of having something different to share.
- Show the math: Have Energy Mortgage partners that provide people with the step by step savings they will receive in energy credits, additional financing options, and utility savings!
- *You are selling current and future Environmental, Energy, and Market Advantages!*

While it took nearly 5 months to finalize the home building process, and properly stage the home, professionally photograph and create marketing materials, (check out: <http://www.effortlesslivingwithconcrete.com>) I am happy to report that the home **sold within days** of putting it on the Multiple Listing Service. Our buyer, a smart business person with involvement in alternative energy/wind generator technology enthusiastically snatched up the opportunity to “walk the talk” of his environmentalism!

When I was invited to meet with NAHB’s Concrete Home Building Council members and staff at the 2007 Concrete Technologies Tour at the building site of yet another luxury ICF home, I jumped on board to express my enthusiasm and experience of marketing an energy efficient structure in the humdrum market place of stick built structures. With ICF structures that withstand extremely strong winds, equivalent R-values in the mid to upper 40's, mold resistance, and enhanced acoustic buffering - one look at the charm and elegance of this Minnesota river cliff home simply spoke for itself. As the owner proudly states, “I feel like I’m living in a castle ~ and my allergies to mold and mildew have disappeared too!”

Green Realtor Certification is now available through EcoBroker™ International consisting of online classes that provide 18 CEU’s and is available through www.ecobroker.com. I am currently obtaining my Ecobroker™ real estate certification, and many aspects outside of the fundamental structure and mechanics of an energy efficient home have emerged that provide exciting benefits in the Green housing market. One of the most exciting is an **Energy Mortgage** offering that allow home buyers additional financial rewards for buying or retrofitting energy saving components into existing homes, making them what I like to call, “smart homes”. Check out: (<http://www.resnet.us/ratings/mortgages/default.htm>) to learn more.)

While I have been interested in the Green movement from both a personal and professional point of view for many years, it has only been within the last couple of years that credible organized certifications are making their way into the trades. The NAHB’s National Green Building Program is taking building standards to a new level, allowing builders to achieve either Bronze, Silver or Gold ratings based on a performance matrix incorporating Lot design, Resource Efficiency, Energy Efficiency, Water Efficiency, IEQ, Home Owner Education and Global Impact. This vitally important program puts standards and practices into the light and helps to squelch the multitudes of “Green Washing” that can be seen in every industry, but maybe none so important or far reaching than home building. (www.NAHB.org).

Through education, an organized “language” will emerge allowing the conversation of “green building” to become less generic, and the depth and breadth of the dialogue to develop into a meaningful exchange.

Green Building practices give all of us the opportunity to connect with our clients through an interesting knowledge-based exchange vs. the simple selling scenario which no one enjoys or is energized by hearing ~ market benefits of the green built home, vs. simply stating the features. Clearly articulate past the obvious talking points of the traditionally built home. Become the educator. Be the leader, because...

Lead, follow or get out the way ~ with or without YOU, the Green building evolution has begun!

For additional information, or to add to this "conversation" please e-mail jpeterlodge@cbburnet.com or visit www.SpectacularPropertiesbyJody.com. Join my blog discussing interesting ideas, and practices.