

Environmentally Friendly Buildings Give You The Best Bang For Your Buck

Elegance and economy. Building a home that is serviceable, attractive, and saves you money has always been a challenge. The latest Department of Energy studies indicate that 58% - 65% of our nation's energy consumption goes into building and maintaining the built environment. Changing our lighting from incandescent to fluorescent fixtures helps, but we must make more significant changes in our building practices if we are to face the challenges ahead.

Does building a home that is both economical and ecologically-friendly have to be costly or unattractive? Not at all. Simple things like building orientation, window placement, venting, and vegetation can all be consciously designed to reduce heating and cooling costs and increase comfort. The direction your home faces, where to put windows and venting are all naturally part of building a home, but "designed correctly, they will have the most effect on efficiency, the sustainable features in a building, and ultimately the most cost savings in utility and maintenance of a building," according to A. Kent Smith, a Salt Lake City architect.

Smith continues, "As with anything, there are trade-offs. Many effective, environmentally conscious choices in building can be cheaper while initially, items such as photovoltaic solar panels and high performance windows, doors, and insulation seem expensive to install, but within a six to eight year period, they save enough on electricity bills to pay for themselves. From that point forward, your cost electricity is \$0. Using high performance windows, doors, and insulation provide a great enough efficiency in the home to pay for themselves within a four to six year period and yet the energy usage cost savings continues for years beyond." No more drafty, cold rooms that cost a fortune to heat.

A. Kent Smith Architects use a design approach that includes using engineered lumber products in lieu of Old Growth lumber, renewable material such as Bamboo and Cork, and recycled products created into doors, windows, flooring, beams, columns, and cabinetry. "Part of the trade-offs in building include using renewable and sustainable products. Not only can these products create a cost savings in the building of the home, but provide lasting enjoyment in beauty, utility, and creativity." According to Smith, these products cost less to create, cost less to use, and yet provide equal or greater lasting service in our buildings than less ecologically friendly products. Their creation even adds jobs, reduces emissions, and provides a more stable product.

In addition to the types of materials used, A. Kent Smith Architects plan each building to provide optimal light, heat gain in the winter, and reduced heat gain in the summer in order to lower heating and cooling bills year-round. Using the natural resources of earth, ground, and appropriate landscaping and venting, temperatures can be controlled in a natural, cost-effective manner, reducing overall maintenance and initial building costs.

Increasing and balancing the flow of new and old air using specially designed venting systems improves air quality, reduces mold and mildew, eliminates moisture condensation, and significantly improves circulation of fresh air into and out of any building. These healthy environment advantages

can be delivered at no additional cost with a properly designed home. No longer does our home need to be a box that we exist in but can become a healthy environment that we thrive in.

How many years have we been told to reduce, reuse, and recycle? Thanks to continued research and product development, we can now build new or redesign existing homes and be environmentally responsible, save money, and live in a beautiful, attractive home for years to come. For more information on how building “green” can be used to make your home elegant, cost-effective, and environmentally-friendly, contact A. Kent Smith Architects.