

Leaving Green

A Boomer's Legacy

What is green building? I have heard so much about green building that I am now officially confused and overwhelmed. Every vendor is claiming that their product is "green." I have been hunting for months to find a consistent list of standards for green building residential construction.

I had been unsuccessful until I attended a meeting at BATC on June 27th. The Minnesota GreenStar Program was announced by its creators; the Green Institute, NARI and BATC. Finally, someone can give us green geeks some direction.

So, what is so exciting about building green and is it really something that baby boomers are interested in? Being the youngest of the boomers I vaguely remember the 60's. What I do remember about the 60's is hippies living in communes being concerned about the earth and its resources. I grew up in a conservative family that used hand-me-down clothes and ate leftovers. I remember being with my parents waiting in line for gas, recycling glass bottles and hearing about aerosol spray cans and how they were depleting the ozone layer. Then I grew up and along the way these memories became very distant.

After graduating from college I completely lost any thoughts on recycling. Let's just say I used without a thought of the environment and then I used even more. I was officially a consumer in every sense of the word. Recycling was for people who needed to collect cans for money. Gas was plentiful and buying brand new consumer goods was convenient (the era of Target, Wal-Mart and other super stores) and affordable. Everything was brand new, cars, houses, TV's, computers, cell phones and the list goes on and on. Recycling became a thing of the past and everything was disposable. Times

were economically good and jobs were plentiful.

Now my children are growing up. Global warming is hard to dispute. Our water is not safe to drink from the tap (so we buy bottled water and create more trash) and our food is being contaminated by water run off (remember when E. coli was just found in meat). When I look at my college-bound son I know that his future holds inventions for new fuel sources, systems for water filtration and ways to grow food organically. And I know that the need for these things came from my generation's lack of conserving resources and attention to sustainability. This leaves me with some guilt and I know that I am not alone.

Over the past few months I have had conversations with older baby boomers who have a renewed passion for the values that they were instrumental in creating back in the 60's. Baby boomers love to spend money and there seems to be no sign of that habit changing. They are finding themselves with extra time to enjoy their lifestyles (and they happen to really like it and spending money to get it) and reflect on what is truly important. They are coming to the conclusion that there are ways to enjoy life with conservation and sustainability in mind.

Baby boomers are paying close attention to the new trends in housing and seem to be holding back from buying. Is it because they wish to be financially responsible and save their money? Or could they be waiting for

the right house that is built with recyclable products that is in a sustainable development? I would place my bets on both. They will buy new homes when the right product emerges and they are investing their dollars and their time in researching new ways to help Mother Earth. The common thread seems to be that we, as baby boomers, will leave something green behind, just not the kind of green other generations left behind. Our children may not be left cash, but they will be left with Mother Earth intact and humans living in harmony, in great sustainable communities. So next time you go to grab a plastic water bottle, opt for your thermos and fill it with filtered water from your kitchen. We can all do something small everyday that can make a difference.

BY SUE MARSHALL

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