



CHOOSING A GREEN BUILDING PROFESSIONAL

Introduction

Are you considering building a green home – one that is energy-efficient, durable and healthy? Are you wondering how to find members of a design/build team that can design and construct such a home? If you live in the San Francisco Bay Area, you're in luck. There are many building professionals here who are capable of building any shade of "green" you might desire. This fact sheet tells you where you might find Green Building professionals and some of the questions you should ask once you've found them.

Finding Green Building Professionals

Though Green Building is becoming more mainstream, it's still a pioneering effort. Whether building a new house from the ground up or adding a room onto your existing home, the main difference between a green home and one using conventional materials and methods is that the "green" option requires more planning, attention to details, and communication among design team members. Because of its holistic nature, the team (homeowner, designer, contractor, engineers, or other specialists) needs to get together early and often, working collaboratively throughout the entire process, brainstorming innovations, agreeing on designs, specifying materials, and avoiding potential pitfalls. These are day-to-day decisions. To avoid difficulties, continuous and open communication among members of your team is critical.

To locate Green Building professionals, contact a local Green Building program or organization for a list of participants or enrolled members (these are listed at the end). Building professionals who agree to promote Green Building and who fulfill membership requirements, such as attending a certification training and/or periodic technical seminars, can become members of such a program. Their names, along with descriptions of their professional services, can usually be found in a Green Building program directory.

Note that membership in a program or organization does not guarantee any specified level of expertise only that the listed professional has qualified for the minimum requirements of getting on the list. Interview a number of professionals, get to know the person you are considering contracting with, and always check past work, credentials and references carefully. Time spent getting to know this person will prove invaluable.

Looking for Demonstrated Green Building Experience

Even though you are looking for a "green" builder or designer, don't neglect to get all the usual information. Be sure you find out what this builder or designer's track record is for building a good product on time and within budget. Find out how long this company has been in business and if this building professional can talk to you in a straightforward way about their costs and process. Most importantly, you need to know if you are likely to be compatible with this builder over the long haul of the process of professionally designing, constructing and financing a home, which is often an arduous and intimate process.

Once you have satisfied yourself about all these matters, go on to "greener" questions. In general, it is best to ask open-ended questions to elicit the most valuable information. For instance, instead of asking a contractor "Do you follow construction practices that minimize contamination and protect indoor air quality?," pose the question in this manner, "What construction techniques do you employ in order to minimize contamination and protect indoor air quality?" Answering the first question requires a yes/no answer and will be "yes" no matter whom you ask, whereas the latter question actually requires a lot more knowledge!

Here are some questions you might want to consider when meeting with a potential designer or contractor.

Does this building professional have a green philosophy of building? Does this person understand how building practices relate to the broader environment? Does it matter to her/him how our use of resources will affect the world we leave for our children? Do you think this person is trying to give you the "right" answers just to get your business

or do they demonstrate real commitment to the health of the planet?

Does this person demonstrate a strong knowledge of Green Building? If you ask about no-VOC paints, non-ozone-depleting chemicals, heating and cooling design by Manual J, formaldehyde emissions, sealed-combustion appliances, passive solar design, and just get a blank stare, chances are this person is not a Green Building professional. Be sure to do your homework on these topics first to know who is answering your questions correctly!

If you are interested in an unconventional material or technique, does this person have the expertise and experience to provide you with it? You might, for example, be interested in a rainwater collection system, earth-sheltering, or a structural insulated panel system. If no one in the area has done what you want, can this professional demonstrate the ability to accomplish something out of the ordinary?

Does this person keep up with advances in the field of Green Building? Do they attend regular Green Building meetings of NARI, USGBC, ADPSR, AIA/COTE, PGE/PEC, etc.? How many national Green Building conferences have they attended? Do they subscribe to major publications and services such as Environmental Building News and Building Green? Are they familiar with innovative local Green Building projects and how many have they done? Do they have good working relationships with other experienced Green Building professionals who may need to be part of your team?

Does this person understand the importance of a team approach in producing a good green home? A building is a system, all parts affecting all other parts. Do they see the builder, the designer, the subcontractors, and you, the client, as equally important players on the same team, all working together to bring into being a high-quality building where you can be happy, comfortable, and productive?

Disclaimer

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Is this professional proud and happy to show you their work? Is this professional glad to have you call on former clients and visit completed projects? What green measures have they included in their past projects? What are they recommending for your particular project? How much will the building exceed any recognized standards? Can the person provide any warranties?

Local Green Building Organizations and their Professionals Lists

- **Architects, Designers, Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR)** Northern California Chapter: www.adpsr-norcal.org has a membership directory
- **The Green Resource Center** has a referral page directing the user to various green professionals: www.greenresourcecenter.org/referrals.html
- **National Association of Remodeling Industry (NARI)** San Francisco Bay Area Chapter has a Directory of people who have attained their Green Building Professional Certification www.sfbanari.com/greenremodelers.htm
- **United States Green Building Council (USGBC)** Northern California Chapter www.usgbc.org/Chapters/northerncalifornia has a list of its members
- **United States Green Building Council (USGBC)** Redwood Empire Chapter www.usgbc.org/Chapters/redwoodempire

For More Information

- For more information about Green Building, visit our website at: www.greenaffordablehousing.org or call Bruce Mast at 510-271-4785.