



Back to the Future with Green Architecture

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Some time honored building practices have been forgotten for the sake of being new or fashionable. In "the good ole days", people built "green", but thought it was just good problem solving. It's time to bring these good ideas back! Here are suggestions to make your home more comfortable and more "green."

Build what you need. Appreciate the quality of a space over quantity of space. Homes become less personal as ceilings grow higher and spaces become larger. A good designer can make your home feel larger by incorporating diagonal views, selective window placements, shared open spaces and details to enhance your living experience. You don't need to build a "small" house, but it might be several hundred square feet smaller than you thought necessary. As Sarah Susanka, architect and author of "The Not So Big..." house writes, "building a smaller house with more interesting design elements or details will add richness to your living experience and be more aesthetically pleasing than the biggest house on the block."

A Good Designer and a Good Builder Matter. Examples of well design homes are found worldwide, in all styles and price ranges. A home will maintain its value, function better and provide greater comfort for its occupants when well designed and well built. These enduring and attractive homes often become the pride of a neighborhood. Using simple roof lines and carefully chosen exterior materials can hold our interest well. Good design beckons one to pause and admire a beautiful structure for its balance and quiet dignity. To be assured of a beautiful design outcome, engage a designer with an "eye for design," who understands the visual language of the architectural style you admire. Find a builder who values the importance of saving energy and incorporating design detailing.

Daylight your new home. Don't "flip a switch" during the day to finish your tasks, use natural light! A designer chooses how your windows will look, function, what size they should be and where they should be placed. This requires careful consideration since from the inside, "windows are the eyes to your world" and from the outside, create the "face" and "personality" of your home. Building science studies show people are more comfortable and happier working under natural daylight because it positively affects one's moods.

Choose the right piece of land and design your house for the site. Chose land which allows you to site your house to take advantage of the naturally cooling, prevailing winds or warming energy from the sun. Planting deciduous trees to the south or east and coniferous trees to the west or north will protect your home from blustery winds and the intense blinding sun. A good designer will consider views within the context of a space's purpose as well as within the site's geography. The value of a beautiful view can be lost behind window shades required to protect the occupant from a glaring sun. Adequate shade can be achieved by incorporating appropriate glass, extended eaves and by adding architectural light shelves and sun shades. Your air conditioning system will run fewer days in the summer with strategically placed windows providing natural ventilation and trees planted in all the right spots!

Use locally available materials. Different architectural styles developed over time because of the geography of availability. People built with materials they found around them and shaped their homes to best suit the climate in which they lived. Hot dry clay and sandy climates were best suited for adobe structures with flat roofs adorned with small openings to keep the interiors cool and protected. In tree growing and northern snowfall climates, houses were built with wood and roofs pitched high to help support the physical weight of snow which also allowed water to "run off." Hot humid southern climates developed homes with tall windows, high ceilings and covered verandas which allowed heat to rise, drawing breezes to cool interiors shaded from the heat of the sun. Locations with termite infestations quickly realized the need to build with inedible materials such as brick, stone or stucco.

Use recycled materials. Structures needing to be moved from their site can be purchased inexpensively and repurposed near by on a new foundation. Buildings which cannot be moved hold within it items which can be installed elsewhere such as beautiful woodwork, stairways, flooring and other architectural elements. If the building will be disassembled, you can use much of the lumber for non-structural applications. You may need a professional to inspect used lumber when installed for structural use.

By incorporating these ideas, you will enjoy a wonderful experience living in your home, save energy and help the earth. The cost __priceless!

"It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little."
—Sydney Smith (1771-1845)