The Green Architect

A new monthly column by Blair Seibert, AIA

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Have you heard of hydro-powered sensor faucets? What about a handle that can be installed on an existing water closet to reduce the water used for flushing by 30%? These products exist and are just a few examples of the rapidly expanding line of goods being developed to support the environmentally sensitive architect and budget-conscious building owner.

The demand for alternative architectural products is increasing. Driven by the popularity of the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) certification program, it's easier than ever to incorporate "green" products into your design. Surprisingly, along with a myriad of new products, existing manufacturers like USG and Armstrong are touting the green characteristics of their older products like never before.

Working on K–12 schools in California in the last five years has introduced many of us to the Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS) program. CHPS guidelines have been used by LAUSD and other public schools to confirm that new schools are providing a healthier environment for kids. Newer programs like Green Guide for Health Care (GGHC) and BOMA's Energy Efficiency Program (BEEP) have been developed over the last two or three years and have created additional demand for green products. As more owners and clients see the benefit to providing better air quality to the occupants of their building and see a reduction in the energy costs, the demand is sure to increase.

Utilizing these programs in your design provides a formal way of documenting the level at which your building is sustainable or environmentally sensitive — but it's not an all or nothing proposition. There are a variety of things we can do as architects to make our projects gentler on the environment, like specifying plants that are native to the climate and installing exterior lights that limit light pollution (illumination of the night sky). What's even better is that these choices may not cost any more and will likely SAVE the owner money after move in (i.e. native plants use less water).

I'll be offering the knowledge I have to the AIA San Fernando Valley by using this column as a forum for green design updates and questions. This month I'll tell you where you can get the items I previously mentioned:
EcoPower faucet, manufactured by Toto. The force of the water in the line charges the battery that activates the sensor.
www.totousa.com

The Uppercut handle, manufactured by Sloan. A dual-flush handle that can be installed on almost any commercial water closet. When the handle is pushed up (for liquid waste) it releases less water to the bowl. When it's pushed down it provides the maximum amount of water the flushing system will allow. www.sloanvalve.com