



The Green Architect

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What is Green Design?

Like many people I found the terms *green* and *sustainable* to be confusing. How are they different? At what point does a project fall into one of the categories? After the June AIA Convention, I think I have some answers. There are actually four types of building design:

○ *Traditional or conventional* design is simple—meeting the minimum codes. It is what most of us have been asked to do for many years, and what most of us will continue to do unless we push our clients (or they push us) to do otherwise.

○ *Green* design is the first step in an environmentally sensitive direction, and likely includes a green rating system like CHPS, LEED, or Green Globes. The list of green components can be overlaid onto the design process to create a green project. Depending upon the number and type of items incorporated into the project, the shade of green can vary from "light" to dark."

○ *Sustainable* design can mean different things in different arenas. For the construction world I prefer the definition established by the United Nations' World Commission on the Environment and Development Report, *Our Common Future*:

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Designing sustainably requires that we look at the building as part of a system. It not only must respond to its site but to regional needs. Absolute sustainability would reduce the damaging affects of the construction and existence of our building by 100%.

○ A fourth, more difficult means of design is *restorative* or *regenerative*. Projects that fall into this category are "using the activities of design and building to restore the capability of local natural systems...", and "taking into account the interrelationship of all organisms" according to Bill Reed, AIA, LEED, with IntegratedDesignCollaborative in Arlington, Massachusetts (www.integrativedesign.net/our_process/home.htm). Bill's projects demonstrate how watersheds can be restored and erosion caused by man's activities can be stopped and repaired.

The exciting news is that developers are learning that by doing good for the environment, the review and approval process by communities and government agencies moves faster and easier.

We are lucky to practice in a place that has a temperate climate. With properly designed passive systems, Southern California could have almost ten months of "free comfort" and almost year around "free lighting." The metaphor presented by one of the winners of the annual AIA COTE Top Ten projects was "start the design process as if your building were unplugged."

To date, no one building epitomizes the word sustainable or regenerative, but many push the envelope in one specific area. The Zero Energy Home (ZEH)* in Edmund, Oklahoma, (blogs.zdnet.com/emergingtech/?p=239) or nominal water use Toyota Motor Sales office in Torrance, California, (which demands 97% less water to operate than a typical building of its size) are exciting examples of owners and architects that are trying to reach the lofty goal of sustainability.

The definition of sustainable design may be a bit murky, but it is clear that sustainability