

PROS AND CONS OF GREEN

Finding what works in green remodeling

GREEN REMODELING'S BEEN the hot topic in the industry for the last few years, but is it here to stay or is it just a fad? What's the future of green remodeling going to look like? Our participants (see how they're selling green in our cover story, page 20) share their challenges and successes with green remodeling in today's market.

Tom: Bernie, what defines green building and remodeling? Any specific examples?

Bernie: The first question for us when we started doing green was how would we define it and market that to the customer. We became EarthCraft [House] certified so we would have an independent company that would train us. Everyone went through the training program. They would come and inspect basically a checklist you would create and submit. We went through a series of inspections.

Tom: John, what marketing ideas have you done to present yourself as a true green remodeler and not simply just

"green washing," which would be my term. I see a lot of people out there saying that they're green and they practice green.

John: Part of it is taking coursework and education so you'll know what you're talking about and you're current on what's being disseminated as green information. Of course, putting it on your marketing in terms of any advertising or mailings you're doing so you're getting people to cue in on that is important. I have gone through the certification process for Minnesota Green Star, which is along the lines of LEED. We actually haven't done a full Green Star project yet. I think up here we make it a bit more complex. We have an 800-point list. We use it as a talking point. Our clients will like the premise and like where it's going but don't want to pay for the extra expense for the inspections and process of doing it.

Tom: Bernie, what do you do for marketing ideas to present yourself as a true green remodeler?

Bernie: We pretty much follow the same route as John in that we market the education we've all been through. We're all certified in this EarthCraft class we've taken. We take refresher courses every six months to a year to learn the latest and greatest things they have to offer. We've done all the same things John is referring to. If the customer has a sense that they want to "go with green," we educate them on what green means, what it does for them and what the value is for them.

Tom: John, staying on the marketing aspect of it, is being green going to be a fad like lead and asbestos were in the past? Where do you see green going?

John: Honestly, right now, maybe green



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JOHN: "(Green remodeling) is going to be around. I think the term green is the thing that's a little faddish right now."

is being a little overused. People are getting a little tired hearing about it. Some clients have picked up on it and are reading about it and are interested in it. Other clients are just totally clueless and it's a new thing to them. We're going to put it out there to show we're up to speed. We bring it up in every client conversation, at least in initial

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GREGORY CAMPBELL/GETTY IMAGES

interviews. We try to get a feeling of where it ranks for them in importance and try to educate them on things, especially things to do with energy efficiency and the longevity of the products we're using on their homes. We've got to say it consistently and then basically educate each client, and take it where it goes depending upon where the client's interest is.

Tom: When lead-based paint came up that same procedure happened. Also, when asbestos came up it was the same thing. We talked about it all the time. It kind of went away — it didn't go away but no one talked about it too much. Now lead is back into the headlines with asbestos. You're saying that green is not a fad but really it is a whole different process, isn't it?

John: It's different and it's going to be around. I think the term green is the thing that's a little faddish right now.

Tom: Bernie, do you find the client is asking specific questions about green, or is it something that the industry is building up? Is it customer driven or is it contractor driven?

Bernie: I think it's a little bit of both. The customer asks some questions, but they don't ask a lot of questions. Maybe one out of 50 we get is really intense on it and has researched it. I think it will become more of a process, like you said. It will evolve into, "this is how we remodel and how we build." It's going to become what we do in the future. Various resources are diminishing and will become more expensive. We've got to figure more ways to be more efficient about what we do.

Tom: John, what do you think? Are they asking questions and is it customer or contractor driven? Is the industry building this up, or is there an actual customer need?

John: It's some of both. But, I'd say it's more industry driven than client driven right now, especially in things like runoff and what-is-green-building material. Those are things that are brought to the client's attention and we're making cases on it. I don't think if the industry didn't say anything that people would think much of it.

Tom: The National Association of Home Builders has a national green building standard for all residential construction: single-family construction, single-family, apartments, condos, land development and remodeling. It was approved by ANSI, the American National Standard Institute. Does it affect your business having that certification by a third party?

John: That becomes one of those benchmarks of competency for any kind of certification. That is why I chose Green Star, which is our local green initiative. I think it creates some credibility with you and your company.

I think it's one of those things that keep you in the game with a client but doesn't necessarily make a difference on who they want to work with. I think we just have to keep working on consistency and universal acceptance of defining what green is.

Tom: Bernie, do you see that to be of value to your business?

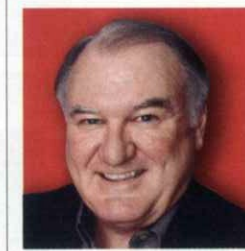
Bernie: Yes, definitely. Defining it and streamlining it gives it credibility for sure. Builders, for example, they've built this same house 20 times. They can tell you

the square foot price for it to be an ANSI certified green or standard construction. People can actually see, touch and feel what it is that they're getting. I think it's a great definition of green and it will help all of us.

Tom: Do you have any last minute thoughts that you would want to leave with a remodeling contractor that

wants to go green and needs some advice from someone who practices it?

John: I thought of one thing that separates the green washers from the green builders. A lot of the green washers tend to think of things just in terms of using green products. Really there's a lot more to it than that. It's about the whole system of your home and how it relates to both your indoor environment and the durability and longevity of your home; the energy efficiency of the home; and runoff water management of your home. Green is really a comprehensive look at how the structure will be built, lived in and used, versus just putting in a bunch of green products. Even Green Star says there are no green products per se. Taking green products aside from the system is pretty meaningless. **PR**



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TALK BACK
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