

## ★ LEED-ING THE WAY

PERHAPS YOU'VE HEARD the term "LEED certified" or seen a home advertised with a Built Green star rating, but wondered, What are these organizations and what are the merits of certifications and ratings? LEED—Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design—and Built Green recognize builders and structures for commitment to environmental issues. Here is an overview of how they are changing building standards:

An environmental building program of the Master Builders Association, Built Green is a network of architects, builders, subcontractors and real estate agents who follow an extensive checklist-and-point system to qualify their projects for one- to five-star ratings. A remodeled home earning a five-star rating, for example, accumulated 400 points on the checklist and met multiple requirements from the one-star, two-star, three-star and four-star rating boxes, in addition to the 14 extra requirements in the five-star box. These requirements include preparing a jobsite recycling plan, attending a Built Green-approved workshop and selecting restricted-flow faucets. (At press time, only 29 buildings in the United States had earned five-star certification.)

The LEED Green Building Rating System is a certification program that provides builders with a set of standards similar to Built Green's checklist that qualifies them for ratings from "certified" to "platinum." Rather than designated additional requirements that come with the point accumulation, certain prerequisites must be met in each category. In the new-construction category, for example, a project must implement an erosion and sediment control plan during the construction process. (Only 23 U.S. buildings had earned platinum certification at press time.)

Both organizations have a series of standards by category with corresponding point values that determine each building's rating. Factors determining points for a project might include site selection, development and design, planning and education, energy efficiency, water efficiency, materials and resource selection, innovation and design process, and construction operations. Specific items on checklists range from using sod grass on only 25 percent of the landscaped area to providing an outdoor clothesline.

"Bonus points," earned for extras such as installing toilets that flush with gray water or taking the American Lung Association's "Healthy Home Training for Building Professionals" course, motivate builders to keep current on policy changes.  
—COURTNEY SANKS



VISTA ESTATE IMAGING, COURTESY WALTON GROUP

IN THE KITCHEN AND DINING AREA OF THIS WALTON GROUP TOWN HOUSE IN THE CENTRAL DISTRICT, GREEN ELEMENTS INCLUDE COMPACT FLUORESCENT LIGHTING FIXTURES, LOCALLY FABRICATED BAMBOO CABINETS AND RADIANT HEATING UNDER CONCRETE FLOORS.

## Onward and Upward

HOW A GROWTH IN KNOWLEDGE  
IS DRIVING THE GREEN BUILDING MOVEMENT

WRITTEN BY **LINDSEY ROWE**

GREEN HOMES may not be trendy 10 years from now, but that's OK with those in the business of building and selling them. In Seattle, the standards of "green" are constantly changing, challenging architects and builders to push harder toward environmental responsibility. Many involved in the green building movement in Seattle believe that before that happens, however, more knowledge about sustainable building practices is needed in the community. "There's just so much information at a deeper level that we're discovering," says Wendy Hughes-Jelen, a real estate agent for Seattle-based GreenWorks Realty.

Hughes-Jelen, who is certified by the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties as a Built Green professional, says that although a three-star Built Green home was impressive a few years ago, today builders are shooting for five-star status. Meeting three-star standards in 2009 should be the same thing as meeting actual building codes, she says. If green is the new black, then five-star is the new three-star.

Along with Hughes-Jelen, dozens of other Seattle-area real estate agents are choosing to learn more about green building. This is vital in order for them to meet greater consumer demand. To this end, more and more agents are taking classes such as the Healthy Home series offered by GreenWorks Realty, where they learn about the elements of sustainable building and how to convey that information to buyers.



**TOP:** FOR THE KIRKLAND DUO PROJECT, YS DEVELOPMENT WORKED WITH THE CITY TO ESTABLISH A GREEN BUILDING PERMITTING PROCESS. **BOTTOM:** DESIGNED BY PLACE ARCHITECTS, THE PROJECT ACHIEVED 4-STAR BUILT GREEN CERTIFICATION WITH A GREEN ROOF, NATURAL STONE COUNTER TOPS, WOOL CARPETS, EUCALYPTUS FLOORING AND MORE.

GreenWorks isn't the only company promoting green-minded real estate. In the last three years 4,000 agents nationwide have become certified EcoBrokers through Colorado-based EcoBroker International, and the National Association of Realtors introduced a green designation for agents last November.

"I think what we're seeing is that there's a growing awareness of what green is," says developer Greg Walton, owner of the Walton Group. But just because professionals are starting to think about green issues doesn't mean everyone is up to date or accurately informed. "It's a very complex thing. It's not as simple as recycling. There are many layers to it."

Real estate agents aren't the only ones looking to become experts on environmentally responsible homes. "There's an increasing number of builders who choose to go green," says GreenWorks founder Ben Kaufman. The main organization driving the increase in builders' knowledge is the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties, developer Walton says. "That's just been a huge boon to the area in terms of raising awareness, both in the consumer and the buyer side," he says.

Education pays off in numbers: In 2000, only four companies were members of Washington state's Built Green program, and

only 36 homes that year were Built Green certified. Eight years later, membership had jumped to 695, and 13,671 homes were Built Green certified, according to the MBA.

**SEATTLEITES VI NGUYEN** and Tim Lennon decided to educate themselves before they went looking for their first home. In April 2008, they attended the Green Festival at the Washington State Convention & Trade Center. The environmental fair is the nation's largest green-living event, held in multiple cities since 2002. Vi remembers one speaker advising consumers who are overwhelmed with a sense of environmental responsibility to focus on big purchases. Realizing that a home is the biggest purchase they were likely to make in the next several years, Vi and Tim put green elements high on their home-shopping priority list.

They initially considered buying an older home with a plan to "gradually do the greening as we went," Vi says, but they couldn't find a house worth the remodeling effort. When they first looked at new "green" construction, however—both aesthetically and in terms of a floor plan—they weren't impressed. "What we had seen in town houses just didn't interest us at all," she says. They were surprised when they eventually found a town house with a design style they liked, in a four-unit project in the Central District. The home, designed by Seattle architect David Foster and developed by the Walton Group, had a layout designed for entertaining, with high-end appliances and fixtures and clean, modern lines. "It was just perfect," Vi says. The couple moved in last August and were immediately pleased that the house didn't smell new. The natural European wool carpet, oak flooring with a low-VOC (volatile organic compound) finish, low-VOC paint and formaldehyde-free plywood and insulation made that first impression possible. "The choices that they made were all about energy efficiency without compromising design," Vi says.

What Vi and Tim found is the kind of green option Greg Walton envisions for the future: an environmentally sound home designed to please the eye as well as the earth. When he started out as a developer in 2001, Walton admits he knew little about building sustainably. "The more we learned about what the issues were, and when I started looking at the costs in terms of landfills and building materials ... it kind of takes your breath away," he says. Walton began focusing on sustainable construction, which

led to considering energy efficiency, how a home affects the health of inhabitants, and then resource management. He now makes sure all of his homes include these fundamentals. The green elements in Walton's Central District project were so numerous that Windermere agents Kimberly and Mark Hobbs listed the benefits of each *room* on their Web site.

Other developers have followed a learning curve similar to Walton's. Yuval Sofer of YS Development began his own business with a sustainable and modern focus two years ago. He builds homes to have a timeless design, with the intent of avoiding wasteful remodels every few years. Another goal is energy conservation.

So far, all of Sofer's projects are on the Eastside, including the Kirkland Duo—the first green-certified house in Kirkland, designed by PLACE Architects. It was part of a pilot program that helped the city implement its own certification process in January 2008. The project took just five and a half months to complete, whereas Sofer says most construction projects take 10 to 11 months. "For work with that level of finish and design, that's a pretty fast time

frame," says Markus Kolb, a project manager at Whitney Architecture. YS Development aims to build all of its homes that quickly. "There's a great deal to do in explaining and educating," Sofer adds. "Throughout [the Duo] project, we had numerous vendors, agents and buyers and really a lot of people interested to see how it could be done."

Knowledge of green building is growing in many sectors—builders, real estate agents, consumers—like a web, until, many agents and developers believe, it will become accepted building practice. "You just can't have too much

education," Walton says. "That's how people really start to understand. I think we're just going to see a growing understanding as all the different stakeholders get more educated."

"America is changing, and the opportunity to upgrade our housing is one of the largest opportunities we have across the country to promote job growth, to lower our collective carbon footprint and to better utilize our energy resources," GreenWorks co-owner Kaufman says. What's exciting now may soon be normal: "We had the computer age, and I think you're looking at the beginning of an energy age." ■



## CELEBRATE GREEN

Living green is about more than just choosing sustainable wood flooring and conserving water by taking shorter showers. To find out the many ways that one can make environmentally thoughtful decisions, check out the **Green Festival** (206-694-5000, [greenfestivals.org](http://greenfestivals.org)), March 28 and 29 at the Washington State Convention & Trade Center. A joint project of Global Exchange and Green America, the environmental fair will include fair-trade and eco-shopping, organic dining and a green-home pavilion. Experts will speak about remodeling, green building, the elements of a sustainable home and more. A weekend pass is \$15.