

Ed Begley, JR. - Why Builders Should Go Green or Go Bust

BY ADRIENNE VAN DOOREN

Will traditionally built homes soon join the ranks of the 8-track tape and the manual typewriter?

Ed Begley, Jr., environmentalist and star of HGTV's hit show **Living with Ed**, believes that may indeed come to pass. I interviewed Ed during the Earth Day celebrations in Washington D.C. and asked him about the future of green building and remodeling. "In today's spiraling housing market, builders need to do whatever they can to set themselves apart," said Ed. "It just makes sense that in such a competitive environment, builders cannot continue to do what they've always done and expect to thrive, or even survive."

Indeed, consumers are now in a position to be very selective. With the cost of energy spiraling and gas approaching \$4.00 per gallon, energy savings has become a much higher priority to homebuyers. Many consumers view an energy efficient home as they would a fixed rate mortgage, a way of ensuring that no matter how high energy costs rise, they've locked in savings for the future.

Consumers also recognize that they don't have to wait for green systems to pay for themselves. By wrapping their energy saving systems, such as geothermal, radiant floor heat, energy star appliances, etc., into an amortized mortgage, their payments may increase by only \$25 per month while their energy savings will likely exceed 3-4 times that amount, meaning they come out ahead from day one.

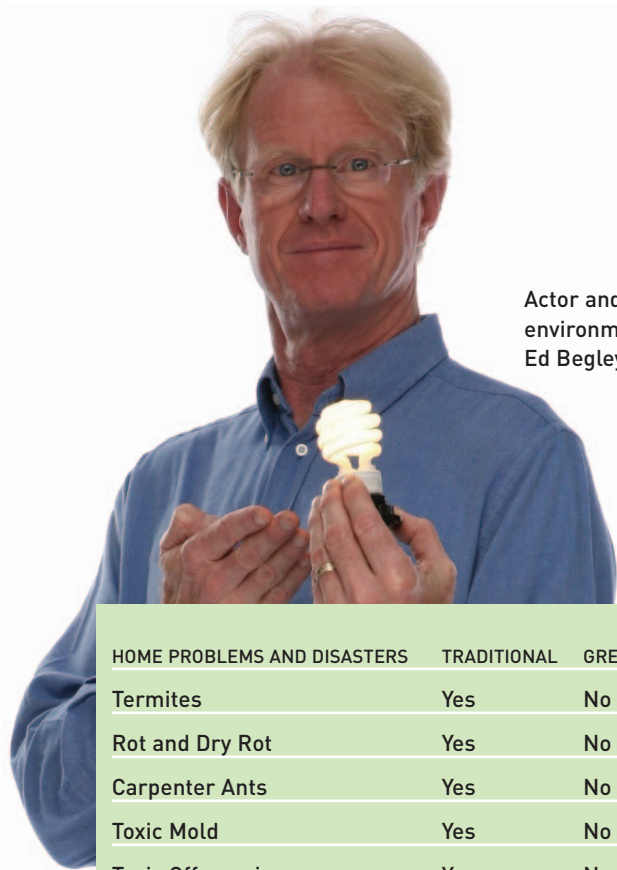
Until recently, many buyers were put off by the higher cost of building

green. However, much like flat-screened TVs, green homes are quickly becoming more affordable. In fact, a growing number of builders are able to build a steel framed, energy efficient, custom green home for the same cost as a traditional custom home. Given two homes of equal price, consumers definitely choose green, not just because of the impact on the environment, but also because of the impact on their family's health.

Studies indicate that indoor air pollution in many traditional homes is far worse than the exterior air. Interior air pollution is particularly dangerous for children. The sharp increase in asthma and respiratory disease in the past 10 years has been directly linked to pollution. Traditional building materials, such as pressed wood and PVC pipe, off-gas formaldehyde and other toxins and pollutants. Luckily, Lowes, Home Depot, and other building supply centers are beginning to carry alternative green products. As demand grows, the prices for such materials should become ever more competitive.

Consumers cite other reasons for choosing green: higher resale value, lower maintenance costs, tax breaks, energy savings, possible insurance breaks, increased longevity of both the structure and systems (e.g. geothermal heating/cooling vs. AC unit) a feeling of personal responsibility and even peer pressure. Buyers also report that they perceive green builders to be more responsible and up to date on the latest technology.

This chart provides an overview of the differences between a traditionally stick-built home vs. a steel/panel built home:



Actor and environmentalist Ed Begley, Jr.

HOME PROBLEMS AND DISASTERS	TRADITIONAL	GREEN/STEEL/PANEL
Termites	Yes	No
Rot and Dry Rot	Yes	No
Carpenter Ants	Yes	No
Toxic Mold	Yes	No
Toxic Off-gassing and Interior Pollution	Yes	No
High Maintenance (painting, staining, sealing)	Yes	No
Fire Propagation	Yes	No
Flood Damage Impacting Structural Integrity	Yes	No
Natural Weather Disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, etc.)	Higher Risk	Lower Risk

Shown the differences side by side, why would any consumer choose a traditional home?

The hard truth is that custom homebuilders who do not adjust to this dynamic shift in consumer demand may not be in business 5-10 years from now. History is full of examples of business shifts that benefit those who embrace the future rather than holding on to the past. For example, in the 1800s, the Vanderbilts realized the shift from shipping to railroads for major transport. As a result they sold their ships and invested in railroads amassing a fortune. Those that failed to understand the shift went bankrupt. The same was true of candle makers after the light bulb, film manufacturers in a digital age, etc. Businesses who stubbornly cling to “the way we’ve always done it” fail, while those who stay on the cutting edge of progress succeed and prosper.

But suppose you are a traditional builder and would like to transition to green. Where do you start? How do you learn all there is to know about the green options, suppliers, certification, training for your employees, etc.? How do you change your marketing strategy?

There are many resources available. You may want to start with the following resources on the web:

NAHB: <http://www.nahb.org/>

US Green Building Council: <http://www.usgbc.org/>

EnergyStar: <http://energystar.gov/>

Build It Green: <http://www.builditgreen.org>

Sustainable Buildings Industry Council:
<http://www.sbicouncil.org/index.htm>

PATH: <http://www.pathnet.org>

Green Home Guide: <http://www.greenhomeguide.com>

Building Green: <http://www.buildinggreen.com>

MyGreenCottage: <http://www.mygreencottage.com>

While there is a steep learning curve associated with the transition, an upward learning curve is certainly preferable to a downward spiral. Builders who want to shift to green should check out the websites above and learn as much as possible about green building requirements. Perhaps the fastest way to transition to green is to partner with MyGreenCottage, a national custom homebuilder, who trains, certifies and forms partnerships with both traditional and green builders across the country. Such a partnership not only lessens the learning curve but also allows local builders to take advantage of national quantity discounts, branding and marketing campaigns.

But whether you decide to go it alone or in concert with others, it’s important to face the reality of the current marketplace: Building Green is the best way to bring in the green! ■

Adrienne van Dooren is National Marketing Director for MyGreenCottage and author of **The House that Faux Built: Transform Your Home with Paint, Plaster and Creativity**. Order this fascinating book at www.familyhomeplans.com. You can also learn more about building green and creating beautiful interiors at www.fauxhouse.com and www.mygreencottage.com.