

Getting started buying a new 'green' home

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Buying a new home is often an extremely challenging undertaking. Countless hours are exhausted touring neighborhoods and scouring the Internet.

Seemingly endless research and discussion often cover myriad details from choosing materials as diverse as bricks and bath hardware and everything in between. But a key part of this process should involve researching green, or sustainable, homes.

Industry proponents contend the many benefits to living in a green home include lower utility bills, increased comfort, improved indoor air quality, longer-running HVAC equipment, improved resale value, and reduced waste and pollution. Any one of these attributes makes a strong case for buying green.

But identifying a sustainable home can be a challenge if you don't know what you're looking for. If you are like me, you feel like the object of marketing campaigns 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The claims made upon products and services can range from truthful to completely outlandish.

As a builder I tell my potential clients about the quality of our workmanship and materials. As heartfelt as my claim is, it is still a subjective pitch motivated at least in part by the desire to sell a home I have built. As a homebuyer, you want to sift through sometimes empty and insincere assertions to find the product that will live up to its claims. A good way to find a home that is "green" is to look for one that has been certified through a third-party verification system.

There are several excellent home certification programs, including Energy Star (www.energystar.gov), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design/LEED (www.usgbc.org), N.C. Healthy Built Homes (www.healthybuilthomes.org), and the National Association of Home Builders' National Green Building Certification Program (www.nahbgreen.org). Each of these programs requires extensive efforts by builders to implement green construction strategies and materials into their homes while being monitored by third-party verifiers. Acquiring any of these certifications is an excellent indicator of a builder's rigorous efforts in constructing a quality Green built home.

When starting your search, look for a general contractor who has knowledge and previous experience in constructing green-certified homes. Green professional designations can help you identify them. These programs are considered a good measure of a builder's understanding and commitment to these important practices. According to the National Association of Home Builders, the Certified Green Professional designation recognizes builders, remodelers and other industry professionals who incorporate green building principles into homes. Class work leading to the designation provides a solid background in green building methods. Realtors can also achieve an EcoBroker designation and a National Association of Realtors' green designation.

Once you have acquired some basic knowledge and the guidance of an educated professional, you will be well on your way to living in a more comfortable, healthy home that will save you money, emit less pollution and give you a lifetime of satisfaction.