



Green building is the future of building

FOR SEVERAL years this column and other articles in *Scantlings* have promoted green building principles to homeowners, timber frame companies, and trade professionals associated with timber framing. As a departure from my previous columns, this one is targeted specifically at timber frame companies and builders in general. While I may risk upsetting some readers with my candid observations of timber framing today, I offer my comments out of passion for timber framers struggling in a down economy.

I believe that green building is the future of building: integrating building systems through a team-oriented design/build methodology is the only proven strategy to thrive in the current construction crisis. The challenge for timber framers and stick framers alike is to refrain from reciting hollow "green" mantras, choosing instead to serve as consultants to buyers for products and services marketable in today's economy and culture. The credibility I can offer is as a contractor whose residential business has been doubling every quarter for the past two years, and will quadruple this year ending with a two-year backlog. I attribute this success not to professional education in engineering or architecture, rather to the opportunities the Guild has given me to study with master timber framers and to be a first-hand witness of meaningful green building.

These are my observations of how consumers perceive timber framers: Timber framing is no different from stick framing except for the size of the sticks; the craft of timber framing is a commodity subject to current market conditions; the systems in timber frame homes are the same as conventional stick frame homes; most timber frame companies position themselves as specialty new-home framing subcontractors.

The results of these perceptions: Framing subcontractors are most negatively impacted by the con-

struction recession; the only growth segment in the residential construction market is green building; most builders, even self-proclaimed green builders, do not really understand green building; the Guild, the Timber Frame Business Council (TFBC), and timber framing publications in general are ineffective at green marketing; true green building is a paradigm shift to a holistic, integrated design incorporating all trades. It is my opinion that timber frame companies that understand the latter will thrive, while others fail.

Seeking evidence to support a move toward green building within timber framing, I reviewed many timber frame websites, including the TFG and TFBC's sites, and trade periodicals. I found none. In contrast to the general lack of green content of these publications and on-line resources, consider the following:

The McMansion, a 3,000- to 6,000-sq. ft. home for a family of four with unused great rooms and formal dining rooms, is out. The most popular home size is now under 2,700 sq. ft. Contrast this to the TFBC's on-line gallery of frame home estates, most over \$1 million and arguably unsustainable architecture. Full-scale timber frames are being replaced by hybrid homes in order to reduce costs. Where are we promoting the concept of smaller or hybrid timber frames? Does an environmentally conscious reader browsing through the latest issues of *Timber Homes Illustrated* or *Log Home Living*? really believe that timber framing is green. Though systems in timber frames and stick frames have remained largely unchanged for 50 years, "green issues" of these periodicals often amount to stapling a few solar PV panels on an inefficient home or upgrading windows. In contrast, by my definition of energy-efficient and sustainable systems are fully integrated with the building envelope.

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