



the road to green

By David Whitemyer

When will sustainable design move beyond its trend status and become deeply ingrained in the profession?

N

o one can deny the fact that the growth of green design has been staggering. It's one of the most chronicled and spoken about developments of the day. That everyone is talking about green design, however, makes this trend just that – a trend. If it were mainstream, designers wouldn't be spending so much energy preaching

and teaching it; instead, they'd just do it.

Think back to the early 1990s when project meetings and client discussions focused on ADA and accessibility. Or how about the mid-1980s when “ergonomics” was the buzzword of interior design? Those issues haven't disappeared, and they are no less important today. Rather, those concerns became so ingrained in interior design methodology that professionals rarely talk about them; they just naturally work them into their creations. When that happens, it's a good thing. And green design is moving in that direction.

“Green design has hit the tipping point,” says Denver-based Interior Designer Annette Stelmack, referring to a concept made famous in Malcolm Gladwell's bestselling book of the same name. In other words, the green design trend has “crossed a threshold, tipped and spread like wildfire.”

Stelmack, co-author of *Sustainable Residential Interiors*, has been focusing on sustainable design for more than 15 years. She's seen its popularity skyrocket in the last decade. “You can't go a day now without seeing something about ‘being green,’” she says. “‘LEED’ has become a household word.”

Industry conferences, such as NeoCon and Greenbuild, are filling schedules with sustainable-related workshops. IIDA, ASID and AIA have formed task forces or committees to bring green design to the forefront and push legislation along. And the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) membership has swelled to include more than 6,000 companies and organizations, including IIDA, and 20,000 LEED Accredited Professionals.

Stelmack buzzes with encouragement when noting that designers old and new – and students too – are hopping on the green bandwagon. “What's happening now,” she says, “is that it's gone from advocacy to literacy to practice.”

THE BIG PUSH

Green design “makes me want to leap out of bed in the morning,” says Holley Henderson, IIDA, LEED AP. “It gives me purpose.” Henderson, Principal of H2 Ecodesign in Atlanta and a frequent speaker on the green lecture circuit, attributes much of the trend to growing public awareness of environmental issues. “Look around us: overpopulation, water shortages, gas prices, sprawl development,” she says. “This stuff affects everyone, and designers are finally seeing that and getting on board.”

From Teddy Roosevelt to Rachel Carlson to Al Gore, environmentalism isn't new. But because building construction now accounts for 30 percent of global raw material use – billions of tons each year – designers are waking up to the fact that since their work is part of the problem, they have to be part of the solution.

Henderson points out that the media has been instrumental in keeping the environmental issues upfront. “Market transformation occurs when green design goes in, looks good and works well,” she says. And celebrity-loving cultures take notice when Julia Roberts builds a solar-powered house and Brad Pitt announces the winner of a Green Globes-sponsored competition for sustainable development ideas in hurricane-stricken New Orleans.



Walking the Talk

One of the world's largest architecture and engineering firms, Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum (HOK), has turned the trend of green design into a corporate mission. "Our objective is to incorporate sustainability into everything we do and to lead design practice into a new way of working," says HOK's Sustainable Design Director, Mary Ann Lazarus, AIA, LEED AP.

The firm — comprising more than 1,900 employees and 24 offices around the globe — is led by a team of professionals who practice what they preach. "This is not a grassroots, junior employee thing," Lazarus says. "It starts at the top." Most of HOK's Executive Committee members are LEED APs, as are the majority of design directors and principals, including IIDA President Pamela Light. The company target is to have more than 40 percent of design professionals LEED AP by year's end, which is the "people" part of their three-tiered sustainable goals: people, projects and practice.

On the "projects" side, HOK begins every endeavor with a LEED/BREEAM checklist, and then tracks it throughout design and construction. Each HOK office is expected to have at least one LEED/BREEAM-registered project under its belt.

The "practice" tier brings green into the office, where sustainability is part of the day-to-day culture in everything from using recycled paper to asking employees to pack their lunches in reusable containers. HOK even recently offset its office energy use with renewable energy credits. "This is how we demonstrate to our partners, clients and friends that we can walk the talk," Lazarus says.

It was, in fact, Hurricane Katrina that kicked a great number of people into the green design arena. Scientists claiming that monster storms may have humans to blame – i.e., human-caused global warming and greenhouse gas effect – forced designers to think globally. But with commercial and residential buildings sucking up 36 percent of the total U.S. energy, it was when the storm shot heating fuel prices through the roof that the cost hit home.

More clients and developers are concerned about the cost of running their buildings and are looking to green design for solutions. People are learning that new sustainable materials, lighting techniques and energy delivery systems can significantly reduce the lifecycle cost of buildings.

But operating costs aren't the only thing bringing people to the green side. "I'd like to think that people are coming to green design because of energy savings and because it's the right thing to do," says Interior Designer Victoria Schomer, ASID, LEED AP, Principal of Green Built Environments in North Carolina. Many of her clients also come for health reasons, such as asthma. A lot of carpeting, particleboard furniture, upholstery and wall coverings used in construction release formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the air. "People now know about new materials that can help them," Schomer says.

The growth in health concerns isn't reserved for the family home. In the United States alone, poor indoor air

would lead Chicago to becoming the "Greenest City in America." Following suit, at the 2005 Conference of Mayors, hundreds of city leaders signed on to the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, committing to reduce greenhouse gases. Along with Chicago and other U.S. cities, Reykjavik, Iceland; Vancouver, British Columbia; Barcelona, Spain; and Sydney, Australia, are leading the green pack. When entire cities get behind a movement like this, it behooves architects and designers to back it up so that they remain competitive.

"Awareness of, and interest in, sustainable design is growing exponentially," says Ken Wilson, IIDA, AIA, LEED AP, IIDA's Sustainability Forum Advisor. "It is true that there are some fears about overcoming the learning curve, but most forward-thinking firms realize that this is something that isn't going away."

“The misconception that green buildings cost more is a major obstacle that is holding green design back.”

— Penny Bonda, Eco-editor, InteriorDesign.net's *The Green Zone*

quality has been blamed for a \$15 billion annual loss in worker productivity. Schomer suggests that business owners and developers are beginning to notice that green-designed buildings tend to reduce employee sick-time, increase productivity and retain workers.

It's not just designers and developers. Entire cities are hopping on the bandwagon. Soon after his election in 1989, Mayor Richard M. Daley declared that he

CHANGE COMES SLOWLY

By 2010, the nonresidential green building market is expected to reach as much as \$20 billion, according to the 2005 McGraw-Hill Construction "Green Building Smart Market Report." In addition, the residential green building market is predicted to grow to upwards of \$38 billion in 2010 from about \$7 billion in 2005.

The numbers may seem outstanding, but they represent only about 10 percent of the market. There's no doubt that sustainable design is on the up-and-up, but why isn't it going forward as quickly as many would like?

First, in spite of all its advances, a number of people still don't take green design seriously. Some clients continue to perceive green design as the hippy-like fringe movement of the Carter-era energy crisis, when rebel architects built odd-looking geodesic homes covered in solar panels and straw bales. It takes time to get the status quo – particularly developers and realtors – to look beyond these stereotypes.

Another hindrance to the green trend is, ironically, the success of LEED. Although tens of thousands of practitioners have adopted the USGBC's LEED system for rating green buildings, there are at least three other competing organizations in the United States alone with their own standards: Green Globes, the National Association of Home Builders and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. And there are many smaller regional systems popping up, such as the Boulder Green Points Program in Colorado and California's GreenPoint Rated Program of Build It Green.

What these competing rating systems do is create market confusion and a "wait and see" stance by designers and developers. Even the AIA won't publicly

holding green design back," says Penny Bonda, Eco-editor for InteriorDesign.net's *The Green Zone* and a contributor to GreenSource, McGraw Hill Construction's online directory of information and articles about sustainable design.

Clients often don't understand the difference between first costs and lifecycle costs; the difference between what a client pays for a finished building versus how much money it takes to run and maintain the building over time.

In fact, studies indicate that a well-designed green space can improve productivity by up to 18 percent, says Wilson, Founding Principal of Envision Design, Washington, D.C. "A typical business spends about \$400 per square foot each year on salaries, technology, rent and other related costs," he says. "If a sustainable design can improve productivity by a conservative 5 percent,

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— Lance Hosey, AIA, LEED AP, Director, William McDonough + Partners

back any one system, instead vaguely going on record as simply being behind legislation that changes the nation's policies on energy.

But even if there were a rating standard that everyone could agree on, there would still be the larger problem of money – or rather, the fear of it. "The misconception that green buildings cost more is a major obstacle that is

then that has a value of \$20 per square foot every year – not to mention savings on energy costs. It adds up quickly!"

OUT WITH THE OLD

Despite the naysayers and other hindrances, green will prevail. Bonda predicts that very soon, financial incentives, such as permitting or zoning incentives

offered by local governments, or lower insurance premiums, will motivate clients and developers to go green.

"You're seeing it already, with some government mandates requiring certain projects to be designed to LEED guidelines," she says. Many local municipalities now offer accelerated permitting on sustainable projects, and all GSA building projects must be LEED-certified. What government did for accessibility, it will do for green design.

Education, more than anything else, is what will push green design into the mainstream. Conference seminars are filling up with design professionals looking to stay up-to-date on the latest green technologies and rating system requirements. Many states already require annual Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for license or certification renewals. Some are considering making sustainable technology education part of that requirement.

Green design is pressing its way into higher education, as well. "Students today care about what is happening to our environment and are very interested in

RESOURCE GUIDE

For additional research, design articles and industry resources on this topic, visit IIDA's Knowledge Center at <http://knowledgecenter.iida.org>. Or visit the following Web sites:

- Athena Sustainable Materials Institute, www.athenasmi.ca
- Build It Green, www.builditgreen.org
- Building Green, www.buildinggreen.com
- EnvironDesign, www.environdesign.com
- Green Building Initiative, www.thegbi.org/gbi
- Greener Buildings, www.greenerbuildings.com
- Sustainable Buildings Industry Council, www.sbicouncil.org
- The Green Design Education Initiative, www.idec.org/greendesign/home.html
- The Green Roundtable, www.greenroundtable.org
- U.S. Green Building Council, www.usgbc.org
- World Green Building Council, www.worldgbc.org

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green design,” Wilson says. “It is their generation that will ultimately make sustainable design mainstream.”

Understanding this trend, the Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA, formerly FIDER) is in the process of changing its college accreditation process to require green design as part of the interior design curriculum.

RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

Lance Hosey is a Director with William McDonough + Partners in Charlottesville, Va., the firm that coined the green term “cradle to cradle.” When considering the immediate connection to people’s lives and spaces, he says green design “seems more urgent in the interior design industry than in any other industry simply because of the frequent churn in tenant lease space.” He acknowledges that we’ve reached the point of market transformation, but we’re not yet at the end of the road.

Hosey, AIA, LEED AP, sees the day when designers no longer focus on sustainability issues separately from other design aspects. “As this movement grows, and more talent is brought in, the technical aspects [of sustainable design] will get worked out, and designers can focus more on the effects of technology and less on its forms.”

Designers must think about sustainability’s cultural and social implications. “Green design is not a kit of parts,” Hosey says. “We can’t simply add a green roof here and a solar panel there, and call it a day. There has to be a more holistic approach.”

Adapted as an exercise by Suzanne M. Heath, Senior Director, Education and Professional Development

exercise:

- 1) What ideas do you have toward making green design “mainstream”?
- 2) What have you personally done to encourage green design?
- 3) What is your city doing to promote green design?
- 4) How can architects and designers stay competitive in this new era of green design?
- 5) What kinds of green design programs/education should be made available?
- 6) How will the continuance of green design influence the profession as a whole? You personally?
- 7) What two movements of the '80s and '90s are compared to the resurgence of green design in “The Road to Green”?
- 8) Name three public servants in support of the environmental movement. Elaborate on the involvement of each.

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Individuals who read this article and complete the series of essay questions above are eligible to receive continuing education credit (CEU), as approved by IIDA. Completed exercises should be returned to IIDA via:

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