

Lowcountry Green Building Insider Report

If you are in the real estate market today, chances are you have encountered the subject of “green” or “sustainable” homes, especially if you are looking at newer construction homes. If those concepts conjure up images of grass huts without indoor plumbing, or you consider it the exclusive purview of the “save the planet” crowd, think again. A green home is built to use resources including water and energy more efficiently which, in addition to reducing the building’s environmental impact, can result in cost savings and a healthier living environment, all of which are desirable to any homeowner.

South Carolina and the Lowcountry Go “Green”

The state of South Carolina and the Lowcountry region have always embraced land preservation and are

now actively advancing the concept of green homes. In fact, the Lowcountry recently enjoyed the national spotlight when the cable TV network Home & Garden Television (HGTV) chose Tradition Hilton Head, a master planned community in Hardeeville, SC, as the site of its Green Home Giveaway contest. The typical Lowcountry house features construction and design elements, fixtures, appliances and furniture known to contribute to an energy-efficient, clean, healthy living environment, and is exemplary of building techniques being incorporated all over the region.

For example, Bryant Park Cottages, billed as Hilton Head Island’s first green development, is a new community of 1, 2 & 3 bedroom homes all built to EarthCraft House™ and ENERGY STAR certifications. Each unit is

equipped with a tankless water heater, ENERGY STAR appliances, compact fluorescent lighting, spray foam insulation and air sealing throughout. Builder Howard Feldman of Coastal Green Building Solutions believes that, “Communities like Bryant Park are an emerging trend in the region.”

Also, the Town of Bluffton’s town council is currently negotiating a development agreement for a tract of land known as Garvey Preserve that would bring the first 100% green community to Bluffton. According to Mayor Hank Johnston, “It will be green in land planning and green in all horizontal and vertical aspects of the development.” All homes in the proposed development would be EarthCraft House certified.

Statewide, South Carolina’s legislature has passed a series of bills collectively known as “Energy Independence for South Carolina’s Future.” aimed at energy conservation and the environment. The initiative broadly addresses energy issues, including sustainable construction in the residential housing market. The most recent bill is the Energy Independence and Sustainable Homes Act, which creates incentive for home builders to construct sustainable homes by providing a nonrefundable state income tax credit of \$1,000 per home built to either National Association of Home Builder’s National Green Building Program, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED for Homes), or EarthCraft House certification.

The Act’s objective is to make sustainable homes accessible to all and applies to

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Homes in Bryant Park Cottages, Hilton Head’s first green development.

homes at every price level. Not only can sustainable homes cut energy bills by an average of 30%, but they can lower water bills and reduce the impact of construction on natural resources.

What Makes a Home Green... Besides the Paint?

By definition, sustainable building incorporates smart design, technology, construction and maintenance elements resulting in a more resource efficient product. However, there are also subtle considerations in sustainable development and building that appeal to common sense but have broad impacts.

For example; Location! Location! Location! When searching for a new house or homesite, common considerations are proximity to schools, services, amenities and other practicalities. This may not initially resonate with a green building checklist, but minimizing travel distances reduces fuel consumption or eliminates it altogether in cases where you can walk or ride a bike. You won't have to look far in South Carolina's Lowcountry to

find locations that meet these criteria. The vast majority of newer construction takes place in master planned communities with those conveniences, as well as land conservation measures, built in.

Other characteristics of sustainable homes are:

- Water conservation measures as simple as low flow toilets and showers, or something more sophisticated like rainwater harvesting systems that recycle rainwater for use in the home's toilets and for lawn irrigation.
- Energy conservation measures such as high efficiency appliances and heating & cooling systems, air sealing through better insulation, and alternative energy sources.
- Recycled and organic materials used in constructing and furnishing the home. For example, furniture in the HGTV Green Home is made of lumber recycled from the house's own construction site.

Concerns that a sustainable home equates to a diminished quality of life are unfounded. For example, if your home is equipped with an ENERGY STAR rated heating & cooling system, or if you upgrade attic and window insulation, the house will still be warmed in winter and cooled in summer, it's just going to do it more efficiently.

You can even furnish and decorate your home's interior without sacrificing luxury and style. "Before, everything was 'rustic,'" said interior designer Carla Jaynes of River Interiors. "People who wanted more upscale would have nothing to do with it, but green is moving high end." Now, rugs and carpeting, as well as cushions and bedding, made from natural and organic fibers are available for a wide range of tastes, and paint manufacturers are offering more non-toxic paints. In addition to being eco-friendly, these things contribute to a healthier home environment.

Getting Started

If you are planning to go green with

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Interior finishes



your new home, a good starting point is to educate yourself, and there are plenty resources online:

- National Green Building Program -- The National Association of Home Builders created the National Green Building Program to establish a link between state and local voluntary green building programs. It consists of guidelines for water, energy and resource efficiency, site development, indoor environmental quality, global impact and homeowner education.
- LEED for Homes -- The U.S. Green Building Council created this rating system to establish sustainable building standards based on energy efficiency. The voluntary system is considered the most dependable and prominent in the U.S.
- EarthCraft House and ENERGY STAR -- The Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association created EarthCraft House in partnership with Southface Energy Institute as a blueprint for homebuilders to follow in advancing smart growth management and environmental stewardship. An EarthCraft certified home meets ENERGY STAR certification, which is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) promoting energy efficient products and practices.

The EarthCraft House certification is widely used throughout South Carolina. To date, approximately 100 homebuilders in South Carolina have been trained as EarthCraft House builders. The EarthCraft House Web site provides a directory of EarthCraft House certified homebuilders.



If you are remodeling or retro-fitting an existing home, ENERGY STAR is a useful source of information about solutions to common home problems as well as products that will help make the home more energy efficient and in many cases more comfortable. The ENERGY STAR Web site provides tools to help you evaluate your home's energy efficiency and offers recommendations and referrals for improvements.

Still, the best green homes are those built green from the ground up. "It's good to catch folks while they're in the building stage," said Tom Trout of Palmetto Electric Cooperative, Inc. Palmetto Electric has created the Touchstone Energy HomeSM program to offer energy efficiency guidelines in newly constructed homes. It includes a combination of requirements and recommendations for properly sealed ductwork, heating, air conditioning, water heating and insulation.

Once you have the background information, it is time to find a builder. In the Lowcountry, the Hilton Head

Area Home Builders Association's (HHAHBA) green building task force is the central point of information to put all the pieces together and get your green dream home off the ground. "We take calls from consumers every day," said HHAHBA executive director, Ashley Feaster. "We are the best resource to help you get started." ☺

Resources

- Beaufort County Association of Realtors / www.beaufortscrealtors.com
- Beaufort Jasper Water & Sewer Authority / www.bjwsa.com
- EarthCraft House / www.earthcrafthouse.com
- ENERGY STAR / www.energystar.gov
- Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association / www.atlantahomebuilders.com
- HGTV / www.hgtv.com
- Hilton Head Area Association of Realtors / www.hharealtor.com
- Hilton Head Area Home Builders Association / www.hhabba.com
- Home Builders Association of South Carolina / www.hbaofsc.com
- Home Builders Association of the Lowcountry / www.beaufort.org
- Palmetto Electric Cooperative / www.palelec.com
- South Carolina Electric & Gas / www.sceg.com
- Southface Energy Institute / www.southface.org

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