

Selling Green Design To Clients Who Don't Ask For It

by Jason F. McLennan and Peter Rumsey

Sustainable design is one of the fastest-growing movements of the building sector. Yet less than 10 percent of all new projects could be labeled green by any definition. Awareness and demand are growing, but are only now entering the mainstream. How can architects and engineers sell green design to clients who don't ask for it?

Designers can stimulate demand, and have a professional responsibility to always try to educate clients about the need to build responsibly, even when they don't appear interested. Designing for comfort, economy and aesthetics is our job, but sustainability and energy efficiency should be our ethic. "Good practice" should be redefined to always include sustainability. Inform your clients about important market trends, and green design is the hottest, fastest growing movement in the industry. Many green buildings are owned by government or nonprofit institutions; it is vital to expand interest in the private sector as well. Developers need to believe that sustainable designs are more attractive to build, own, lease and sell. This will make green design self-perpetuating in common practice.



and values that they don't support. Fundamentally, sustainable design makes better buildings. Improving performance, saving money, and increasing health and productivity are basic business objectives, not political hot-buttons. Staunch conservatives can appreciate the benefits of sustainable design while disliking some of the buzzwords.

Environmental protection shouldn't be a partisan issue, but strategies for accomplishing that shared goal can become politicized. Use data and proven examples; people can comprehend that which they can measure. Demonstrated skills and credibility in this area will allay clients' concerns about the risks of new approaches.

Show clients that your suggestions add value for them. Stand in their shoes and understand their motivations to shape your pitch. A friend of ours described the first step as "accepting someone where they are, but then helping them move forward from that position." Don't be heavy handed or try to shame anyone into doing the right thing; guilt is a poor motivator. However, everyone is motivated about something. Often it is money; sometimes it is public image or occupants' well being. Indoor air quality and mold concerns are currently hot topics.

Whatever the reason, sustainable design offers many advantages. It results in lower operating costs and—with careful attention—competitive initial costs. Green buildings provide superior performance, healthier indoor environments, reduced risk of complaints and lawsuits, and marketing benefits such as a positive, innovative image and product differentiation. Sell the economic and health benefits, not reduced pollution or moral imperatives. Everyone can agree to saving money. Believing that it is the "right thing to do" or "something to tell your kids about" is a bonus. We spend most of our time talking about economics, although deep down we do sustainable design to reduce environmental impacts.

The strongest selling points add no cost. For example, building orientation and shape alone can significantly lower energy use at no expense. An integrated whole-systems

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Don't assume that someone isn't interested in sustainable design because they haven't asked for it. Some clients assume that they can't afford it. Others aren't aware of the benefits and successful examples, or don't realize it is an option for their project. Many will accept whatever their architect or engineer recommends unless it changes their economics.

Clients' attitudes affect their receptivity. Misconceptions conjure images of impractical solutions and wacky building designs. Semantics can get in the way if clients associate terminology used to describe green design with concepts

approach is the best path to sustainability and affordability. Green design isn't "tacked-on" at the end of the project with a few features added as garnish. Sticking photovoltaic panels on a roof as an afterthought without first improving efficiency of the building might be relatively easy and offers some symbolic value, but would be the wrong solution. Including photovoltaics as an integrated part of the design after systems have been optimized is the preferred approach. Better design yields multiple benefits.

Peter redesigned a large airport's HVAC primary-secondary pumping system that had 38 pumps and 34 variable-speed drives (VSDs) totaling 1,364 HP. By carefully matching capacity and load requirements, his "rightsized" variable primary-only pumping scheme used only six premium-efficiency pumps with VSDs totaling 360 HP, yet saved almost \$1 million in construction cost and \$50,000 annually in energy costs. This kind of compelling opportunity can convert reluctant clients into sustainable design advocates.

A final point regarding professional integrity: a designer should not compromise his/her ideals just to please a client or win a job. If a client is irresponsible with their money and plans a project that will hurt a community or unduly burden natural systems, then you should walk away—even in tough economic conditions. This doesn't mean hold-

ing people to impossible standards, or letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. It takes time to open people's minds to new possibilities, and sometimes baby steps are necessary. But if the horse is dead, then dismount. **EDC**



McLennan

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