

# Green from the Inner Core

In House Builders brings green building to the middle class

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Moonshine Ink

When Jude Gavigan walks onto the dirt lot of his newest building project, he is not thinking about PV solar systems or low-flush toilets. Instead, he looks up, traces the trajectory of the sun, and examines the lot's topography, seeing how a home would fit into the land.

Beginning before a foundation is poured or a single piece of lumber erected, Gavigan's In House Builders uses the most elemental principles of green design to build a home that is heated by the sun, cooled by the earth, and sits positioned so that nature does most of the work. From there, In House Builders puts together simple, clean, efficient designs that are durable, cost-effective, and aesthetic.

"We're green from the inner core out," said Gavigan, owner of In House Builders, a seven-year-old, full-service design/build company in Truckee.

Green building, for all its amazing growth in the last decade, has wandered far from its beginnings of practical design. Today, you are more likely to hear about green building in multi-million-dollar homes or public buildings, sporting high-dollar solar systems or pricey appliances. The trend is what Joel Sherman, owner of the Truckee-based JLS Design firm that is currently working with In House Builders, calls "trophy green building."

But for years, green building was simple, affordable, and efficient for those who had the ingenuity and recognized the sensibility of building a home that harnessed natural and



**PRACTICAL GREEN:** In House Builders' recently completed project in Russell Valley highlights the outcome of the Truckee company's design/build philosophy, green building principles, and a design that highlights the structural aspects of a home. Photo courtesy of A Day in Your Life Photography

practical energy efficiency.

In House Builders is marrying that common sense practicality of green building with a design sensibility that showcases the structural elements of a home — all while working to bring back an attainable level of green and sustainable building for the middle class.

"It goes back to that grassroots of the industry..." said Gavigan. "I think there are a lot of people who want to do those things but are afraid of the costs. We are trying to educate people that the cost is not that much."

On one of Gavigan's most recent projects, a Russell Valley home that employs hydronic heating, structural insulated panels, and an air recuperating system, he started by positioning the home to face the sun and by sinking the house into the hillside. The effect — warm sunlight as well as summer cooling from the earth — is an example of the practical elements of In House Builders' design philosophy, which is married to new advancements in sustainable and energy efficient building.

Structural Insulated Panels use significantly less lumber, but provide nearly double the insulation value. Hydronic heating is typically 20 to 25 percent more efficient than a furnace. Concrete floors are not only practical but also provide thermal mass that holds heat more efficiently.

One of the key elements of In House Builders' process is the integration of the design and build process. Gavigan likes to work on a home from the very beginning — fitting the site configuration, architecture, and construction together into one cohesive package. That integration is important when function drives design. The architecture and building meld to focus on one outcome — the most efficient, sustainable, and practical home possible.

Sherman, of Truckee's JLS Design, is currently working with In House Builders on a project. Sherman, who calls his design philosophy "site-generated design," allows a site and the function of a building to dictate its look and feel. Rather than building a home and then slapping on a façade to generate a certain "mountain" style — something

Sherman refers to as "cartoon of imagery" or "fabricated nostalgia" — Sherman allows the true structural elements of a building to show.

On the design side and on the building side, Sherman and Gavigan have very similar visions, and are working together on building projects from start to finish. The partnership, where builder and designer work hand-in-hand, delivers excellent customer service to the homeowner, and allows an exchange of ideas about the home between designers and builders from the very beginning of the project. And homeowners have the ultimate flexibility and creativity to greenlight or cut details from a project as it evolves.

"It is a turn-key deal," said Gavigan.

Gavigan will work with homeowners to be as creative as they want to be. He has salvaged metal roofing from Truckee's historic Star Hotel for a home project. He has taken material from an old Georgia Pacific mill in Northern California and given it a second life as trim in his Russell Valley project. He'll even work with homeowners to receive a green certification for their home.

"It's like a marriage you go through with a homeowner," said Gavigan.

With the growth of awareness in energy costs and the rise in demand for green building, Gavigan feels the time is right to make green building more accessible to the middle class.

"Things are shifting that way, and either you hop on the train or you jump off," said Gavigan.

In House Builders has hopped on, and a host of homeowners looking for practical, sustainable, green homes are hopping on with them.

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