



LEED or Follow?



By Matt Powers

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WHEN I MENTION LEED HOMES TO MOST OF our prospective clients they immediately have an image of a small rectangular home with large overhangs, solar panels on the roof, a water collection system and reservoir in the backyard; and definitely a place to plug in their electric car. While these certainly have a place in some markets, most of those clients don't seem to find their way into our office, or the Houston marketplace.

While the definitions of style and elegance evolve every year, our commitment to our guiding principle of building homes with timeless elegance that blends the craftsmanship of yesteryear with the technology of today, remains a constant. That commitment to the blending of technology into our building science is what led us to the LEED program.

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This globally recognized seal of quality is one of the original attractants for us in the development and commitment to a LEED program for the homes we build. Like many builders in the custom market, we built a good home. We included foam insulation packages, energy efficient heating and cooling systems; we even registered the homes as green certified. However, as originally quoted by the famous enlightenment writer, Voltaire, and later by Jim Collins in his book entitled *Good to Great*, "good is the enemy of great." What we were missing was an internationally recognizable symbol and benchmark of how these homes are built. That is the LEED for Homes program. Our market is becoming more and more diverse. Last year we built homes in Houston for clients from not only all over the country, but also all over the world. The LEED program provides a scorecard for each home, not only saying that it complies, but also provides a clear and concise picture of the ways that it performs at a higher level. The scorecard and its comprehensive nature had us examining each

of the "good" things we were doing; but it also highlighted a few components that we needed to consider that impact the home's overall performance. Today, with the implementation of smarter product choices, advanced framing techniques, and better air filtration, we are building a healthier, more efficient home that meets the LEED certification with the same style and elegance.

What does this mean for homeowner's of a LEED certified home? It means their home has received the most difficult to obtain, and comprehensive certificate from the most established green building program. This certificate is not one that is simply applied for, and obtained after construction is complete. The majority of projects that start down the LEED process never reach certification. To ensure success, we partnered with an independent energy and sustainability consultant to evaluate each home we build. The consultant, along with the architect, engineer, and interior designer became an integral part of our



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team. They independently review every component and system of the home prior to construction to evaluate its contribution or detractor to the home's overall performance. As the home progresses, they field verify materials used and installation techniques to ensure compliance. Once completed, the home is performance tested to validate its compliance. The resulting LEED certified home on average uses 20-30% less energy than similar code compliant new homes. They are designed for the occupant's health, with maximizing of fresh air and minimizing exposure to airborne toxins and pollutants. At completion, many of the products and techniques may be unnoticed by the casual observer. However, with less maintenance, lower energy bills, and healthier homeowners, these homes are in demand.

So last year, when presented with all of the facts regarding LEED certification and how we could implement it into our building program, we faced one final question, and that was cost. While every project is different, we have found that the additional investment required by us to obtain the LEED status is very minimal from the "good" product we were already building. As an additional bonus, our LEED certified homes are demonstrating a premium in the marketplace. Customers recognize the value of a documented benefit that a LEED certification provides. These homes are selling faster, and at a premium, to comparable homes.

So, to answer the original question, I chose to LEED. LEED makes "cents" & sense. ■