

# The End of the “Wander Years”

**Green Building grows up and settles down to stay.**

By John Wagner

The time just after college is sometimes referred to as the “wander years.” It’s when you know you have to join the mainstream, but you still resist playing by the rules. You selfishly hold onto freedom as long as you can, staying out way too late the night before the job fair, and ignoring sound advice of any kind, especially from your exasperated father. (Maybe you even briefly hung out with a crowd whose only virtue was that all their tattoos were spelled correctly!)

Well, 2008 may be the end of the wander years for the green building movement, as it grows up and its disciples realize that they’ll have to enter the mainstream, start playing by some commonly acceptable rules, and begin hanging out with the right crowd.

Though there will be a continued renaissance of product development (which has been nothing short of remarkable), national regulatory agencies, code bodies, building standards, and certification systems will bring a more professional tone to green building in 2008 and beyond.

Need some evidence? Easy.

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) will launch its National Green Building Program at the 2008 IBS Show in Orlando. The program will be based on the new National Green Building Standard, the result of cooperation between NAHB and the International Code Council. (The National Green Building Standard replaces NAHB’s Model Green Home Building Guidelines.) The Program will standardize the rating of houses for green features through a national, interactive, web-based certification system. NAHB will also introduce its Certified Green Professional training program, so builders, remodelers, and developers will, at last, have a chance to get certified for green.

And LBM Journal is launching its own national Certified Green Dealer Program, which brings standardized certification and green training over the web to the nation’s lumber dealers. This program taps into the nation’s top building experts to show how basic building science is (and should always be) the true underpinning for all green products and practices.

USGBC’s LEED for Homes program has also launched. Though LEED-H will not have the architects as an accelerant (which is what really helped LEED gain

dominance in the commercial sector), LEED-H is one more sign of national efforts to standardize the industry.

NAHB, Certified Green Dealer, and LEED-H all join a proliferation of local, state, and regional efforts—some programs of which adopt LEED or NAHB standards and layer on region-appropriate technologies—to enhance green building knowledge and acceptance. Collectively, these efforts will bring all of construction the opportunity to train for green, and green-up any project through the guidance of third parties.

I have to say, after watching this industry mature since I started writing about it in 1988, I think it's a good thing that the wander years are over.

### **Product Innovation: Green's Red Hot**

For those of you who think that regulation and building standards will stifle creativity and innovation in product design, think again. And again.

In the last two years, nothing has been hotter than fast-tracked green product innovations that have rushed to take advantage of the boom in green building. The fact that green building is the only sub-sector of building that hasn't cooled in the recent downturn will accelerate these innovations even more. Add in the fact that projections for growth in green building put it at a \$50 billion market by 2010, a vast leap from the \$7 billion spent in 2006. Though some companies got a headstart on going green years ago when developing products to comply with California's Title 24 regulations, there isn't a serious company in this building sector today that isn't focused on green in ways large or small, whether those efforts are focused on supply chain optimization and scrutiny of their packaging, or innovations in insulation, adhesives, paints, roofing products, lumber, and even cordless batteries.

I don't question the motives of the people who are producing green products now, even if they are late to the effort. The building industry has always been about making money by offering products with incremental improvements over the competition. What's remarkable today is the alignment of a number of factors—namely green product innovation, the profit potential for sales of premium green products, and the clear need and desire at every level to build energy-efficient, less resource-intensive structures. All of these value drivers are collective, pushing on the green movement to innovate and grow, while homebuilders and buyers are pulling through on the other end, hungry for honesty, clear guidance, and willing to pay a premium for green.

Are you ready to take advantage of this market? If you don't have a green strategy, you'll be caught short, because green is no longer an exotic; it's the mainstream.

