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Sustainability for the rest of us

A lot of heavy thinking is going on at The Ritz-Carlton, Sarasota, this week, as an international group of experts has convened for the conference Rethinking Sustainable Construction 2006.

While architects, engineers and planners pondered carbon-neutrality and the "triple bottom line" model of sustainability earlier today, Matt Ross kept it real for those whose names were not followed by the initials FAIA, LEED AP or Ph.D.

Closing a session called "From Florida House to Your House," which also featured John Lambie, Steve Suau and Terry Osborn of the Florida House Institute for Sustainable Development, Ross told the attendees how to "green the mainstream."

For Ross, sustainability and green construction moved out of the lab and into the field years ago. His for-profit company, Eco-\$mart Inc., tests, promotes and markets many of the green products demonstrated at the Florida House Learning Center, at Beneva and Proctor roads in Sarasota. Some highlights of his presentation:

-- When marketing green houses, convince the builders/buyers to "do it for the money." The cost to build a green house is about the same or only slightly more than a conventional house. The cost to operate is less, so the buyer can qualify for larger mortgage. They will get "more home for less money," and the house will have a higher resale value. (Eco-\$mart's cost comparison chart is at www.ecosmartinc.com. Click on "free guide.")

-- The house's sustainability is achieved through green materials and methods in six key areas: Poured concrete or structural insulated panel (SIP) walls; a poured-concrete, SIP or foam-sealed roof; passive solar heating; high-efficiency air-conditioning (SEER 13 or higher, up to the SEER 22 Freus AC); low-e, impact-resistant windows; and graywater irrigation (the recycling of water from showers into the toilets).

-- Green savings also can be gained by using energy-efficient lighting (compact fluorescent bulbs), native landscaping, EnergyStar-approved appliances and WaterStar-approved plumbing fixtures, renewable flooring materials (bamboo) and other materials that are green.

-- Building green is more profitable for the builder.

-- "There is virtually no inventory of these kinds of homes. But builders are starting to realize they can differentiate themselves from the competition by building green homes" that are healthful for the occupants and disaster-resistant.

As I like to say, a green house is one that you don't have to haul to the landfill after a hurricane.

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