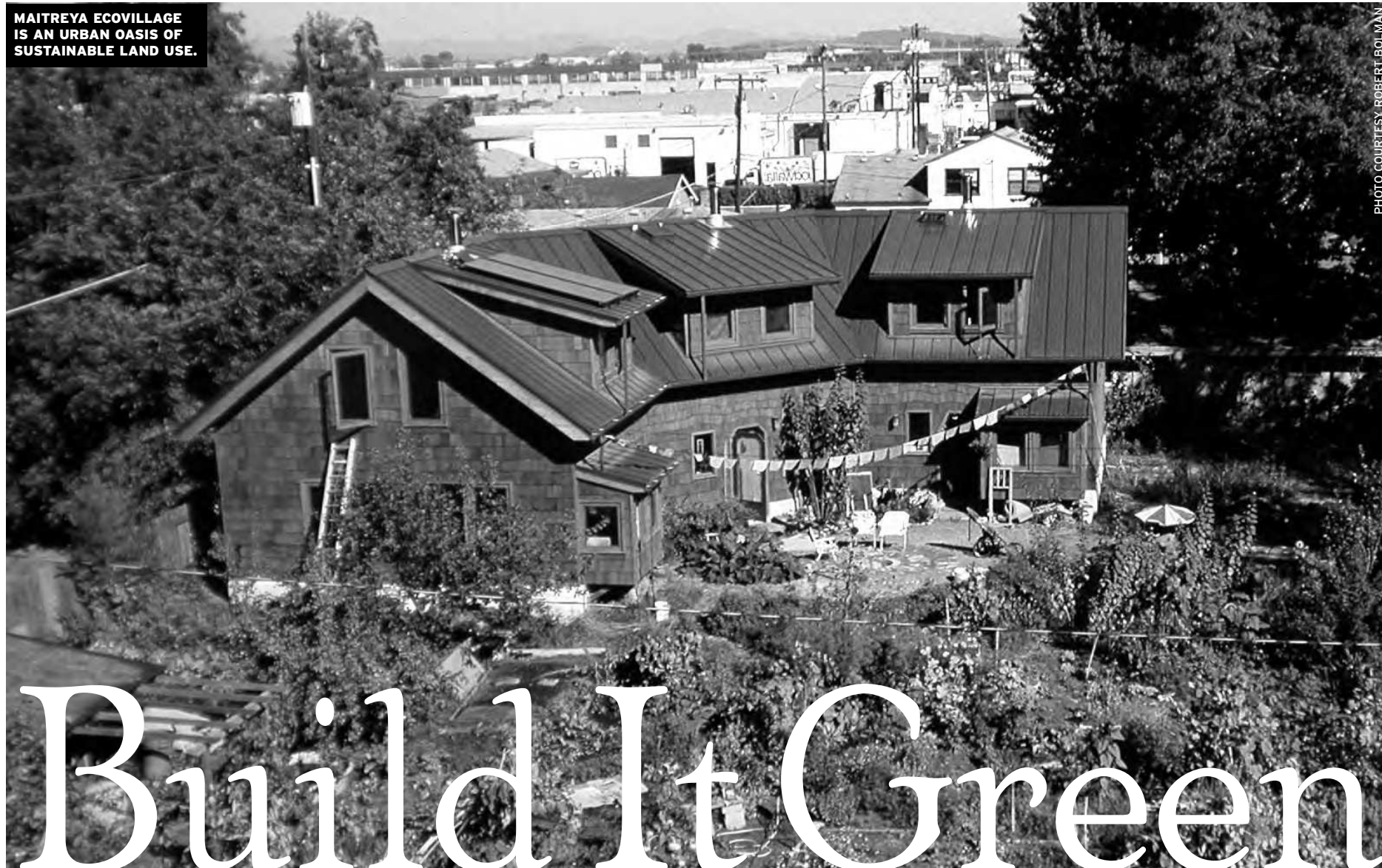


MAITREYA ECOVILLAGE IS AN URBAN OASIS OF SUSTAINABLE LAND USE.

PHOTO COURTESY ROBERT BOLMAN



# Build It Green

**SUSTAINABLE BUILDING MOVEMENT IS GAINING MOMENTUM.** by Bobbie Willis

The alternative “green” home built on eco-friendly design and construction principles is moving closer and closer to the mainstream realm. Even national retailers such as Home Depot are responding to the client and builder demand for environmentally friendly building options. Jerry Johnson, department manager of lumber for Home Depot, says, “There’s absolutely the demand for these products, especially here in Eugene.” Johnson says Home Depot has stopped carrying any old-growth lumber, specifically replacing the one-by clear Doug fir with one-by hemlock, which functions similarly to Doug fir without the impact on old-growth forests.

In addition to these environmental concerns in building, health issues come into play. Construction of homes and small commercial buildings often involves the use of materials containing pretty nasty building blocks, such as formaldehyde, solvents, evaporative petro-chemical distillates, aromatic chemicals, etc. “Sick building syndrome,” where these components break down and create toxic off-gassing within the home, has become a modern home hazard. Even traditionally accepted construction practices, such as wrapping a home’s interior walls with Visqueen plastic or using particle board based countertops, are coming under suspicion as health hazards.

While there’s no consensus on the actual danger of using this or that product or the hazards associated with some construction practices, it’s become clear that there *are* people who suffer adverse reactions, sometimes severely adverse reactions, to chemicals in the environment — many of these people feel

sicker at home than in almost any other setting.

As cost and availability are always factors in determining use of these “easier” building materials, Alec Dakers, designer with Rainbow Valley Design and Construction, says, “Our consumption has become disconnected from the product.” Dakers is the go-to guy for green design at Rainbow Valley. He says that green, or sustainable, building often overlaps with good design principles. He explains that a well-designed building has a lot to do with efficiency; spatial efficiency (also known as “right sizing”) and energy efficiency are just two factors that play into good design, as well as into a green, sustainable structure.

Dakers believes the recent spike in utility costs has a lot to do with more and more people looking for building alternatives. “The energy crisis is a big deal. It has people really considering energy efficiency in their homebuilding projects.”

This is only part of the reason that green building is moving from the alternative fringes to the mainstream. Bruce Sullivan, president of the Eugene chapter of Northwest EcoBuilding Guild, says, “What characterizes the national green building scene is to say, ‘There are pockets of interest ...’” Sullivan believes that this interest is indeed growing. “Judging from the attendance at our monthly classes, there’s a tremendous amount of inter-

est. We pack the McNail-Riley House every month to standing room only.” Sullivan also cites EWEB’s recent adoption of the Earth Smart program, and former Gov. Kitzhaber’s sustainability agenda as signs of public interest, particularly Pacific Northwest public interest, in issues of green building.

But what exactly *is* green building? Dakers says, “It’s very complex. There’s no real consensus on what green construction is. Essentially, what you build should have a

little impact on the environment as possible. You try to keep a few simple, basic tenets in mind.” Dakers explains that a lot goes into the definition of green building and especially into green building materials. “There’s something called embodied energy that looks at the whole lifecycle of a product — how

much energy it takes to make the materials, how many people are actually involved in production, even how far the materials have to be transported for use — all of this can factor into the degree of green building...”

Green building makes use of recycled materials and, Dakers says, renovating or remodeling can be a really great way to use sustainable practices in building. As for cost, Dakers says, “It runs roughly 10 percent more up front. But in the long run, green building can cost less.”

Without a standardized method to measure

green-ness, sustainable building could go the precipitous route of organic food labeling. Both Dakers and Sullivan mention Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design in Green Building Rating System (LEED). LEED provides a point system to rate green construction, as well as certification and accreditation programs for builders. But, for the most part, green construction is open to interpretation.

Sullivan mentions that David Eisenberg will be speaking in Eugene at 7 pm May 9 at the EWEB Training Room. Eisenberg is director of the Development Center for Appropriate Technology (DCAT) in Tucson, Ariz. DCAT provides education and support to building officials, designers and builders nationwide to promote sustainable construction and development practices. “David is doing a lot of really good work in terms of trying to make changes at the national level to support sustainable building.” But Sullivan adds, “Change in this industry comes very slowly — it took 30 years for builders to accept and use sheetrock.”

Green building is gaining momentum. Sullivan is glad to see changes like those being made at Home Depot. “It’s just like organic food. Once we put the green materials on the shelves where people can see and compare, people will buy them. We’re just at the beginning of this curve.” And in the long run, green construction could mean better, healthier, more efficient buildings that fit the global landscape more appropriately than just any old McMansion. As Dakers says, “The boundaries for the affects of green, sustainable construction are much farther out there than we think — it’s not just your house; it’s community.”



JAN SPENCER SHOWS WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH A CONVENTIONAL HOUSE AND PROPERTY.