



HEALTHY HOMES

diamond in the rough

Whether it's asked for or mandated by the state, Wm. H. Fry Construction Company knows how to deliver sustainability—award after award proves it

by Kelli McElhinny

BABY-PROOF HOME. In preparation for a new baby, the firm helped a Palo Alto, CA, couple overhaul their entire home—from living room to nursery and dining room—for environmental safety (shown above). The firm partnered with local green-home-products store RECLAIM to achieve the transformation. Photos: Michele Lee Willson. Photo Styling: Laura Del Fava.

Bill Fry has been relying on green-building techniques since 1980, when he bought his first home amidst Northern California's iconic redwood trees. He used an old basketball court for his hardwood floors and included windows with reclaimed wood in that renovation.

Now, an increasing number of builders are catching up to him, and so are their clients. "At the end of the day, a lot of the green building is consumer driven," says Fry, owner of Cupertino, California-based Wm. H. Fry Construction Company. "More and more homeowners are interested in green building and green home remodeling." In response, Fry earned his Certified Green Building Professional certificate in 2009.

One interested client was a Palo Alto couple expecting their first child. To prepare their home for the baby, they wanted an environmentally friendly overhaul in everything from their heating system to their cleaning products. They went so far as to personally reuse glass handles from the home's existing doors, even though they weren't incorporated into the redesign.

For the project, Fry partnered with RECLAIM, a local store that specializes in green home products. While Fry installed a radiant heat system, bamboo flooring, and cotton insulation, RECLAIM pulled together the sustainable interior with no-VOC paint and eco-friendly furnishings.

In addition to providing clients with informed choices toward a healthy, energy-efficient, and resource-efficient home, Fry is sought after for his dedication to fine home building. In 2007, he built a new home for one of the owners of Pine Cone Lumber, a lumber supplier in San Francisco's South Bay. The home has radiant heating and, thanks to solar panels, a near-zero electric bill.

In 2010, Fry earned a Gold Nugget Award of Merit for Best Renovated or Restored House or Project for a remodel and expansion of a home in Los Gatos, California. The Gold Nugget Award is the largest and most prestigious competition of its kind in the nation. The award winners were chosen from 440 entries in the 14 western states and from the international arena.

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Beyond client requests, Northern California builders are getting extra incentives to go green from their local governments. “The state of California and our local cities are doing a great job with promoting green building,” Fry says.

Inspired by the California Energy Code, known as Title 24, many cities have developed green-building guidelines that surpass the state requirements. In fact, Fry is helping his hometown of Cupertino develop its own checklist.

Fry’s clients tend to be most focused on the energy efficiency and health benefits of green building. Indoor air quality is an issue of particular concern. Fry notes that off-gassing from formaldehyde found in adhesives used in pressed wood products and flooring can have respiratory and carcinogenic effects on health.

He emphasizes that those effects are magnified in airtight homes and recommends avoiding formaldehyde and other VOCs, opening windows frequently, and installing an air-exchange system to ensure that fresh air circulates throughout the house.

With this knowledge, Fry is able to reduce formaldehyde in home construction by crafting custom cabinetry, either specified with local cabinet shops or produced within his own high-end cabinetry shop, with Columbia Forest Products PureBond formaldehyde-free (and optionally FSC) hardwood plywood.

Another health risk that doesn’t get as much attention in the environmental sphere is lead-based paint in older homes. “If you don’t address lead during deconstruction, you’re defeating the purpose of going green,” Fry says. He adds that most of the homes in his projects were built before 1960, which makes them likely to contain lead, a neurotoxin. As an EPA lead-safe certified firm, Fry abides by the EPA Renovation Repair and Painting guideline.

With Fry’s history at the forefront of green building, it’s no surprise that he would still be working to bring attention to needed changes in the industry.