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Abode Builders of New England design/build new green community

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When it comes to building houses, more and more people are going green—choosing designs, technologies and materials that save energy, reduce operating costs, and improve quality of life. In the resort town of Waterville Valley, a new community is being built that is completely green—Green Peak, a development of custom-built attached homes.

"Green Peak is one of the most beautiful locations in New England," said Bob Wildes, president of Abode Builders of New England, which is designing and building the community. "It has sweeping views of Mount Osceola, along with all the amenities of Waterville Valley—pedestrian access to golf, cross-country skiing, hiking and biking trails and more, all right outside your door, literally."

Green Peak is a natural extension of Bob Wildes's 30-year history of green building, which culminated with his founding of Abode Builders in 2007. These days, Abode is a nationally-recognized design and construction firm that has won awards for innovation in green building.

The homes of Green Peak are being designed with energy-efficiency features now considered standard in green buildings, such as high-quality, energy efficient windows and doors, high-performance insulation, high efficiency heating and cooling systems, and water-conserving products and appliances. "All of these features have been shown to reduce costs in the long run, in addition to protecting the environment," said Wildes.

But Green Peak will also include special features, such as insulated concrete soundproofing between the units. "This is the material we use for our insulated foundations, but we're also using it as an additional layer to provide sound attenuation between the homes, in addition to the standard concrete walls that each of the homes has," said Wildes.

The 2,500 s/f homes of Green Peak (not counting a large unfinished basement) will feature three or four bedrooms, oversized garages, and covered porches, all designed for maximum energy efficiency. "Builders use a blower door test to help determine a home's air-tightness," said Wildes. "It's a test that shows how good your design is and how well you executed that design." According to Wildes, the blower door tests for Abode homes are typically 40% or more higher than for a standard home built to code.

Building a green home isn't just about saving energy; it's also about protecting the health of the people who live in it, according to Wildes. "When you have an extremely tight building, you want to make sure the atmosphere inside is as healthful as the atmosphere outside," he said. That's why Green Peak homes feature a heat recovery ventilation (HRV) system that mixes outside air with warm air from the house to provide fresh air throughout the house. "And there are additional fresh air returns in critical areas like the bathroom and kitchen, where you tend to get moisture, odors, and particles in the air," says Wildes. The filtration provided by the HRV system, added to that of the

filtration system from the high-efficiency furnace, essentially provides the home with double air filtration.

As in all Abode homes, the Green Peak homes will also feature low VOC (volatile organic compound) paints, carpets and pads, as well as non-toxic caulks, sealers and adhesives. "Again, the goal is to provide healthy, comfortable living in a setting that's also good for the environment," said Wildes.

Interest in the new neighborhood is high, with two of the first three custom attached units already spoken for, and plans on the drawing board to build additional units. "These are homes for people who want a luxury custom-built home in a beautiful location, but don't necessarily want the headaches that come with designing a home," said Wildes. "This lets them start with a basic structure that is comfortable, energy-efficient and eco-friendly, then customize it to the degree that they choose." Homeowner options might include a custom kitchen, special finish work, flooring, or maybe a stone fireplace. "We can basically customize just about anything," said Wildes.

Mike and Tina Koppel took advantage of that flexibility to make a few tweaks to the design of their new Green Peak home, such as a downstairs powder room that became a pantry and triple-paned windows with built-in honeycomb blinds rather than the standard double-pane windows. "We didn't change that much, but we were able to customize it as much as we wanted to," said Tina.

For those looking for more privacy, Abode is also building a single-family green home on the side of Snow's Mountain in Waterville Valley. "This is a fabulous location, looking west across North Waterville to the sunset, Mount Tecumseh and Green Peak," says Wildes. The home will include three bedrooms, two and a half baths, family room, enclosed year-round sunroom, wood or propane fireplace, and two-car garage. As with the Green Peak homes, the Snow Mountain home will feature a high-efficiency heating system with heat recovery ventilation.

Abode Builders is a nationally-recognized design and construction firm, winner of the "Best Green-Built Home" award at the Best in American Living Awards (BALA) in 2010. "Our goal is to build homes that are beautiful, comfortable, low-maintenance, and highly energy efficient, using materials that will last," said Wildes. To the greatest extent possible, Abode Builders uses locally-sourced materials for environmental sustainability.

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