

## Use this time to educate yourself on sustainable and green design or you may be left behind

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We are now into the spring season and are 2 months into a new administration in Washington, DC. Everyone is still waiting to see if the economy is stable, the market has hit the bottom and unemployment is not going to rise anymore. We are all just sitting back and waiting before taking any action. But has there been a fundamental change in attitudes? Will it change what we will need to do to meet market demands? I believe there is and lots of people much smarter than me that feel the same.

As the market recovers during the next year there will be a need to reevaluate the products we are offering to the public. The marketplace is rethinking what they truly need, what they can afford and what is important in life. The days of spend, spend, and indulge have come to an end. People are looking at life with a new perspective and thinking that a few good things are more fulfilling than having a lot of stuff. This is translating into a new awareness of what homes we live in, the places we work and where we spend our leisure time.

As an architect we welcome this change in the marketplace. No longer do we just design a home to be big for the sake of being big. We have clients focus on what they need and want in their home. It is no longer what they think everyone else is having or big just because the house next door is that size. This new awareness of what is important for them helps to create a home they will enjoy; creative thought from the entire team creates a home that has character and quality and a timeless sense of comfort. This can be achieved with a little more effort from the client and very good listening by the architect. What results from this process is usually a great home with less square footage, meeting needs of not just the client but many other people as well. We can really work with them and gain better insights into things that will make their life easier on a daily basis.

The other aspect you hear about is the sustainable or green design movement. Many of you may have lived through the oil crisis of the 1970s and remember all the talk about solar and renewal energy. This was a trend that did not sustain itself as cheap energy and the desire not to sacrifice took hold. Today we have a similar trend but with it comes an awareness and social conscience that was lacking in the past. It is here to stay this time and has been integrated into building codes, tax incentives and marketing material like never before. Architects and other construction professionals are being trained and certified in energy efficient design principles. Energy suppliers have proven that conservation and energy efficiency are better ways to do business than creating new power plants. Anyone who does not use this slow time to educate themselves will be left behind.

This type of team approach takes a little more time but we as architects learn so much that can be used when working on other homes and more importantly integrated into the spec homes and condominiums we design for our developer clients. This type of interaction can be far more valuable than some market studies or research into the latest design trends. We translate our knowledge and

provide a better designed product for our developer clients.

Developers need to get better connected and prepared for this new marketplace before the turn around or they will be left far behind. Some of our clients understand this change and are acting now on it. We are involved in a redesign and reposition of a luxury condominium development which had large expensive units and areas for optional expansion for buyers. The market for such huge amounts of space was not proving profitable. We have redesigned the buildings to include more units with less space, without any major rework of the existing infrastructure for this client. The units still have the large living areas and amenities of the old units but eliminate the unused expansion space and convert it into saleable square footage. The net result is 10% more units on the same land and an increase in net revenue for the development.

We welcome the new attitude in the marketplace and embrace the concepts of efficiency, sustainability and quality design. It will make for a better environment for everyone now and in the future.

David O'Sullivan, AIA, CAASH, is president of O'Sullivan Architects, Inc., Wakefield, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540