

What Is Sustainable Design?

What is sustainable design? It is designing responsibly to resolve complex problems in order to protect, nurture and improve our environment. It involves new land development and construction, redevelopment, renovation and restoration.

Sustainability arises with high demand, coupled with manufacturing methods, resulting from overpopulation. Polluted air, water and loss of forested land are strong indicators towards promoting new, environmentally safe methods. Sustainability encompasses everything we construct from buildings to cars, from communities to economics of a region, from land use, redevelopment and restoration to city infrastructures.

Key issues include energy efficiency, renewable energy, environmentally sustainable building materials and techniques, healthy building design, life cycle and maintenance costs, economic factors and incentives to promote "green" building products and services.

During the 21st century sustainable design will evolve into a standard of integrating, seamlessly and unobtrusively, "green" building systems into the building and manufacturing process.

Sustainable features to consider as a part of your next project include:

- Large overhangs
- Solar shade screens
- Deep porches
- Energy efficient lighting
- High performance windows
- Insulated foundations
- Passive solar design
- Natural daylight harvesting features
- Radiant heating and cooling
- Energy efficient fireplace units
- Water-efficient washers, dishwashers and toilets
- Engineered wood products
- Recycled wood flooring and decorative architectural elements
- Natural fiber carpets and textiles
- Solar water heaters
- Solar electric "photovoltaic" roofing shingles
- Geothermal heat and gas heat pumps
- State of the art HVAC systems
- Rainwater collection
- Gray water (run-off) irrigation
- Storm water infiltration systems
- Xeriscaping to include water conserving native plants
- Landscaping/tree preserves as natural habitats for wildlife
- Recycling bins and collection systems
- Energy management systems

Coupled with the idea of sustainability there is growing research evidence that the human brain and behavior are linked. Biophilia research dealing with office-worker productivity, daycare facilities, and elderly housing projects recognizes that natural landscapes reduce stress, aid in recovery, and facilitate physiological well being. Certainly more connections between our environment, our mind and our body will be discovered as further research is completed.

As an industry, interior designers are responsible for specifying and supplying huge quantities of material goods for residential, commercial, hospitality, retail, healthcare, institutional and government projects in the way of finishes, fixtures, furnishings and fabrics. As a result we not only supply billions of dollars worth of product, but we also provide advice and recommendations, while influencing the buying decisions of millions of consumers. Therefore, we are in a unique position to perform an integral role in bringing these issues to the forefront. By supporting companies offering "green" manufacturing processes and considering smart growth alternatives, we can contribute in this global effort to protect and save our environment.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) provides guidelines until a universal language is adopted.

The Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED®) also offers a rating system for commercial, institutional and high-rise residential buildings by the US Green Council, which represents all segments of the building industry to help establish guidelines. Visit <http://www.usgbc.org/> for more information.

Many approaches are necessary to address the needs of future. Individually and collectively, pooling our knowledge and resources, it is possible to create environmentally sensitive projects, while conserving resources and improving the quality of our lives, if we put forth the effort. It won't necessarily be easy, but by discovering new methods and working to implement more thoughtful systems, it is possible we can leave the environment we began with in a better position to sustain life for another millennium.

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<http://www.dezignare.com/newsletter/sustainable.html>