Custom Home

GREEN NEWS

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Mid-Range Sustainability a New Niche Among Top-Tier Homes

By Hallie Busta

As sustainable specs become status quo in the custom market, the resulting shades of green have some custom builders thinking hard about how to reach the middle of their buyer market.

Although consumers show interest in mobile apps that track their energy consumption in real time, their willingness to wire their homes with similar technology is less certain—even in a market segment that tends to build bona fide green homes. Until

The strategy, it seems, is somewhat conventional. Think of a high-end grocery retailer, says Stephen Aiguier, president and founder of Portland, Ore.–based Green Hammer. In addition to its top-of-the-line products, the company also offers an in-house brand, which is value-added. When the formula is applied to a segment of its homes, that value includes heat recovery ventilation systems and air tightness factors four to five times higher than standard homes. "We are thinking about how we can do high-efficiency, healthy, comfortable buildings at all levels," Aiguier says.

Custom builder John Hall Homes near Chicago is applying a green ethos with a "Smart Green" classification that general manager John Hall Jr. says lands his homes somewhere between Energy Star and LEED, while keeping them affordable. "Green is the big catchword but it's such a vague concept that we decided to use [the brand] because we were looking for that targeted approach," he says

Cellar Ridge Custom Homes in Oregon is working on a similar concept. The company's 50-10 Houses incorporate a suite of energy-saving features that make the homes 50 percent more efficient but increase construction costs by only 10 percent. Partners John Mead and Carson Benner say they strive for Passive House standards—short of the aesthetics. "The maniacal obsession with energy and our linkage [to it], which Passive House brings, is really valuable and that's what we are benefitting from," Benner says.