

Green Determination

LEEDing by example

by Hilary Grant with photography by Dennis Swanson

I *Imagine this:* you are a young entrepreneur in SLO County, and after a year of planning are now about to completely tear down and renovate the interior of your new business. Client satisfaction is the highest goal, but there's another criterion: the remodeling must be green and eco-friendly.

You want a contractor who shares your vision. You also understand that recycled and reclaimed materials will play a large part in the design. But beyond that, to whom can you turn? Where will you find the best advice? Perhaps most important, how do you know this commercial build will be done in accordance with state-of-the-art, national green building standards?

All of these answers can be found in one place: the United States Green Building Council, a 15-year-old non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C.





Pizza Fusion restaurant in SLO: Built to LEED Certification Standards

Dedicated to expanding green building practices and education – in fact, a primary mission is to make green buildings available to everyone within one generation – USGBC’s membership is comprised of more than 17,000 building professionals. According to spokesperson Ashley Katz, that roster includes engineers, architects and service providers, as well as organizations like schools, government agencies and corporations.

The group is perhaps best known for creating the prestigious LEED® system.

Short for Leadership in Energy and Environment Design and developed eight years ago, the LEED process determines just how environmentally friendly green buildings really are. Included are commercial and neighborhood developments, as well as schools.



The product of recycled blue jeans: Ultratouch—a highly effective insulator



Using a voluntary point system, five components are looked at: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials/ resources selection, and indoor environmental quality. Those who earn a certification, says the USGBC, will ultimately lower operating costs, see less waste sent to already overburdened landfills and notice a reduction in harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

LEED is also considered a nationally accepted benchmark for green builders, although passing the highly regarded process (applications are available online) only takes about one month after the build is complete. As part of the procedure, Katz says that a certified LEED provider comes in person to administer a specified performance test and a detailed, specific inspection on the build. There are only a

handful of these providers and none in SLO county yet.

But LEED certification isn't just for commercial builds.

Indeed, with its LEED for Homes program, the Building Council has now established green standards for residential builds. According to the USGBC web site, this one year-old addition to LEED seeks to recognize and reward the top 25 percent of new homes designed with environmental stewardship in mind. With this agenda, the Building Council hopes to educate building professionals on how to best construct residences that utilize green practices. And, by recognizing single-family homes, USGBC says it's acknowledging that the largest and most active area of green building these days is in the residential marketplace.

But what about that SLO entrepreneur?

He's Brandon Borene, the newest franchise owner of Pizza Fusion — a two-year-old, Florida-based pizzeria chain that does the walk when it comes to staying on an environmentally conscious path. Opening his branch next to Trader Joe's in SLO at the end of this year, Borene says he'll be applying for a LEED certification. (Another California Pizza Fusion, in San Diego, has already earned the honor. While some of the franchises don't apply for the certification, all are designed to LEED specifications.)

Once Borene's build passes LEED standards, he knows he'll have shown a tangible commitment to social responsibility.

Fletcher Burton, the Arroyo Grande contractor Borene hired for the six-week build, shares Borene's LEED vision.

Pizza Fusion's bathroom, complete with Ecotech tile and low-flow toilet



However, Burton does offer a few cautionary words.

"Whether it's a commercial or a residential project, this kind of build will cost more and probably take longer to complete," he says. "But when it's all finished, remember that the extra money and time are well worth it. You'll know that you're raising those you love in a place that doesn't contain, and wasn't made with, harmful chemicals."

Borene adds, "It was important for me to start with someone like Fletcher, who was familiar with green building and LEED. That eliminates a lot of the legwork up front. You just build it green – it's that simple.

"So if you want to improve an existing home, then change your light bulbs

to compact fluorescence, repaint with a no-VOC paint [smog producing volatile organic compounds], install solar tubes, and replace toilets with dual flush modules."

For major remodeling – all part of the Pizza Fusion project – Borene suggests denim insulation (Fletcher Burton chose UltraTouch®, manufactured by Bonded Logic), recycled glass countertops (a product called Vertrazzo®) and cabinetry from green wood products (in this case, a combination of plywood and bamboo called Plyboo®).

In addition, the restaurant has a 40-gallon water heater – most restaurants need 150 to 200 gallon models, says Borene – because the wash cycle is in warm water and takes just 90 seconds from start to finish. Delivered from

Eco-Labs on an as-needed basis, the eco-friendly dishwashing detergents Borene's using do most of the extra cleaning and consequently, replace the necessity of using hot water.

Other green touches include renewable wind energy, which offsets dirty power sources, framing materials from recycled metal, and bathroom tiles culled from recycled waste residues. There's more: finish stains on the concrete floors are organic and soy-based, and with its walls covered with zero VOC paint, nasty fume odors are non-existent.

Borene adds that there have been two unexpected challenges to his build.

"The biggest thing was staying focused," he says. "It's easy to find yourself lost in conversations with people about

Pizza Fusion's interior boasts Plyboo cabinetry and Vertrazzo recycled glass countertops




building green. The days could really get away from me, and I honestly mean that!" Second, Borene affirms the increased costs that Fletcher Burton mentions. "Using green products are about 15 percent more expensive than those used in a traditional build," explains Borene. Indeed, he cautions that anyone looking to go green needs to consider this additional expense.

The good news is that USGBC's Ashley Katz says that the higher costs once associated with building green have been steadily declining. "Looking at our statistics around the country, the up-front costs for a high performing green office building average only one to two-percent of the overall budget," she says. "While the variety of green building materials once was sparse and limiting—which did bring up costs—now the choices for environmentally friendly materials are endless—and we expect this trend to continue."

"Even big-box, home improvement retailers are beginning to offer these products, and in some instances, are showcasing them in their marketing. I think this is really telling in terms of trends."

That's all welcome news for Brandon Borene, who adds that reducing his restaurant's carbon footprint has had some unexpected—and positive—consequences.

"I'm becoming more green in everything I do," he says. "It's like an addicting game. Now I'm always looking for ways to make improvements around my house, or figure out how to increase the fuel mileage in my car." 

Visit www.usgbc.org to find out more.

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