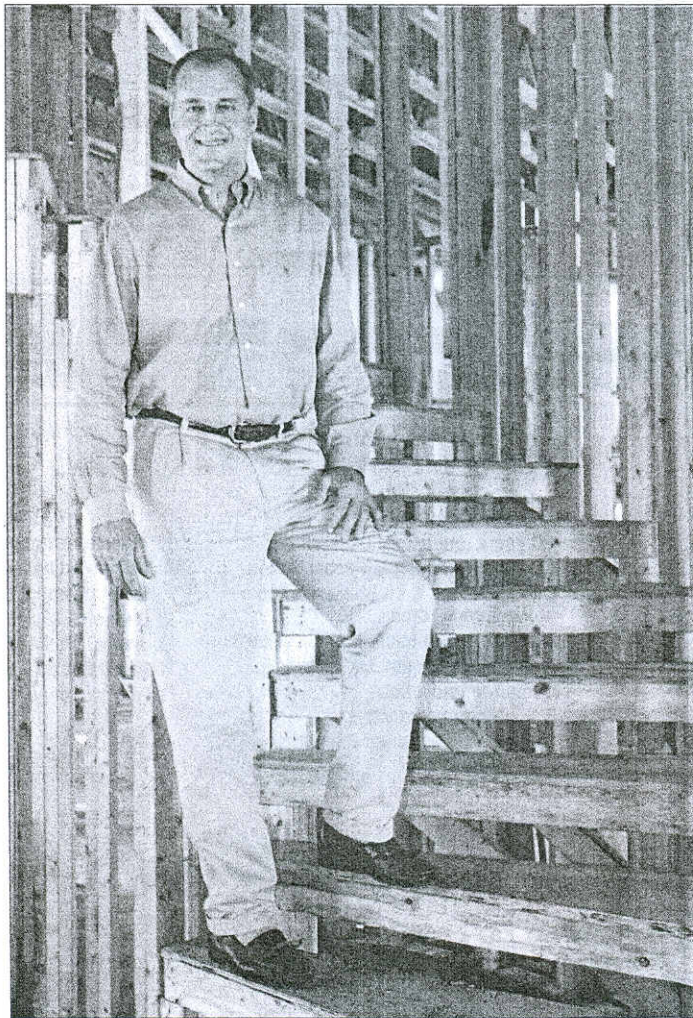


# HILLSBOROUGH Homes & Classified

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TAMPABAY.COM

## The 'green' house slowly blooms



Times photos — STEFANIE BOYAR

Jay Fechtel is a champion of "green building," a movement the National Association of Home Builders calls "one of the most significant developments in home building in the past three decades."

■ A few builders offer efficient, water-wise, healthy homes in what is called a "quiet revolution."

By JANET ZINK  
Times Correspondent

Sure, Jay Fechtel wants to build beautiful homes.

But that's not enough.

"If you're going to build a house, make it beautiful, make it efficient, make it healthy," says Fechtel, who in 1988 founded the Fechtel Co., which builds custom luxury homes.

Fechtel is a champion of "green building," a term that refers to construction that is energy efficient, conserves water and is even good for the health, because it improves indoor air quality.

Call it holistic home building.

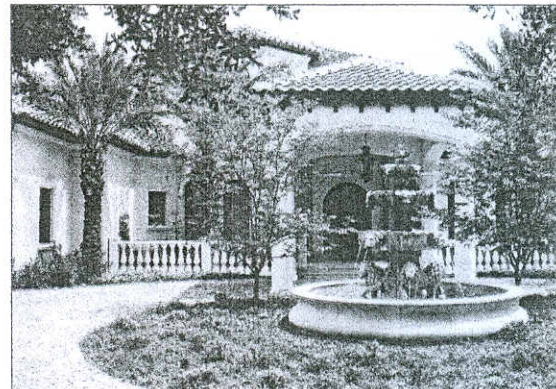
Today's environmentally sound construction looks nothing like the hippie image of geodesic domes and homes with plants on the roof.

"People have this idea in their mind that if they're going to build a home that's environmentally conscious it's going to be an ugly box," Fechtel says. "It doesn't have to be that way. It can be a beautiful home with beautiful landscaping and beautifully sited."

The Fechtel Co. has been focusing on energy-efficient and water-wise construction for nearly five years.

In July, the company received top honors at the Southeast Building Conference for its water and energy conservation construction. The honors were part of the Conference's 24th Annual Aurora Awards, which recognize building and design excellence from among more than 400 entries from eight Southeastern states.

Fechtel won the Grand Aurora



The Fechtel Co. received top honors at the Southeast Building Conference for this Avila home built in 2000. Now Jay Fechtel is building a model home in Odessa that will take the green concept to another level.

Energy Award and the Grand Aurora Water-Wise Award for a home the company built in the North Tampa community of Avila in 2000.

Special features of this Mediterranean-style home are a high-efficiency air-conditioning system, state-of-the-art insulation, appliances that conserve water and energy, and monitors to turn off sprinklers when it rains. Fechtel preserved existing foliage and wetlands during construction and employed xeriscape principles in the landscape design.

Fechtel is currently building what he calls the Renaissance House in the Odessa community of StillWater. The model home, he says, takes the green concept to another level. Not only will it be energy and water efficient, but it will have features that improve indoor air quality and be built with as much reclaimed material as possible.

Fechtel says he offers green options — including solar water heaters, high-end air filtration,

automated lighting, programmable thermostats and double-paned and coated windows — to all of his clients.

"Every single one of our clients for the past three or four years has opted for at least one of the energy-related or water-conserving technologies and most of them do more than one," Fechtel says.

The most popular item is a system that pipes hot water generated by the air-conditioning system to the hot water heater so the hot water heater doesn't need to be turned on as often.

"Not only does it save water, but it saves electricity," Fechtel says. "That's just one very simple technique, and it's cost-effective. It's a no-brainer."

The system costs between \$900 and \$1,400, depending on the size of the house. In summer months, Fechtel says, some of his clients have said their hot water heater hardly ever has to fire up.

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Fechtel also likes to use high-efficiency air-conditioning systems that constantly move air through the house at a slow, steady speed to maintain temperature instead of going at full throttle until the air cools and then stopping until the home warms up. The low-speed, continual airflow saves electricity. It also removes more humidity from the air, which reduces mold and mildew, a major cause of allergic reactions.

"What started as an energy saving technique also has great air quality and health benefits," Fechtel says. "Many of these things synergistically work together."

In the coming months, David Weekley Homes will introduce "Healthy Homes" to the Tampa market, a product the company has been offering in Texas for about a year.

"Historically, builders haven't looked at a home as an entire system," David Weekley says. "How they are interrelated and work together dictates a healthy home."

Air-conditioning ducts in David Weekley's Healthy Homes will be sealed with mastic compound instead of tape, making them energy efficient and less likely to leak, another way to curb mold and mildew. David Weekley uses waterproof Duroc in the bathrooms to prevent leakage and mold growth.

Many green features cost more than traditional approaches, but in the end, Fechtel says, clients save money on their electric and water bills.

"It's an investment," he reasons. "Some things you put in a house and all you can do is look at them. But if you invest \$1,000 in an upgraded piece of equipment and that saves you \$120 a year, that's a 12 percent return on your money. It's better than putting it in a savings account."

Weekley, whose company builds homes in such Tampa communities as FishHawk Ranch, Westchase, Waterchase and MiraBay, says he's using some of the newest technologies available, but isn't yet ready for the cutting edge because of its relative cost.

"We're doing things that we think are most efficient," he says. "Ours is a combination of healthy and energy efficient. But we also want to be smart about it and cost-effective about it."

Building homes in harmony with the environment is nothing new, says Yann Weymouth, a member of the Florida Green Builders Coalition and an architect in the Tampa office of Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, a national firm known for its environmentally friendly designs.

Prehistoric humans, he says, commonly chose to live in caves with openings that faced south to take advantage of the sun's heat in the winter, when the sun is low in the sky, but avoid direct rays in the summer, when the sun is high overhead.

"For thousands of years we've always as human beings adapted our homes to make sense," he says.

Even the wrap-around porches typical of old Charleston homes served the dual purpose of shading the house while providing a place to enjoy the outdoors.

With the advent of electricity, air conditioning and central heat, those issues became less important.

Weymouth, like many others, became interested in green building during the energy crisis in the 1970s. But only in recent years, the era of curbside recycling, has the idea gained momentum.

"It's coming very fast right now," Weymouth says.

The National Association of Home Builders, in its March 2002 report titled *Building Greener, Building Better*, said green building is "one of the most significant developments in home building in the past three decades." The association called the movement "a quiet revolution in the way that new homes and communities are planned and constructed."

Two years ago, the U.S. Green Building Council established the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design system for rating green construction. The system rates buildings in such categories as location, water conservation, energy efficiency, material selection and indoor air quality.

The U.S. Navy, Seattle, Los Angeles, San Diego, Arlington, Va., and Portland, Ore., are using that scorecard in some capacity on new construction.

"It's happening community by community and step by step at an accelerated rate," Weymouth says.

Fechtel, Weymouth and Weekley all say that green building is simply the next step in building science.

"In a very short time we're going to take it for granted," Weymouth says. "And that will be good."