

Interview with Jerry Yudelson, author, “Green Building A to Z: Understanding the Language of Green Building” (New Society Publishers, September 2007).



Where did you find the original impulse to write *Green Building A to Z*?

*There is a green building revolution underway, affecting every sector of the building industry, including offices, schools, universities, hotels, retail stores, hospitals and the full spectrum of residential buildings. I wrote *Green Building A to Z* because I saw a need for a concise, accurate and intelligible definition of the terms used in this industry.*

Did you have specific readers in mind as you were putting this book together?

Green Building A to Z is, for anyone who would like a quick introduction to the language of the industry and rationale for green buildings, as well as for builders, developers, contractors, engineers and industry professionals.

I hope that public officials, business executives, facility managers, real estate brokers, government agency staffs and people in the insurance, finance

and marketing industries will gain an understanding of the key terms and concepts that define the green building industry.

Green Building A to Z is really for anyone who has an interest in more environmentally responsible buildings.

How does this book differ from other books about green building?

*I wrote brief, entertaining definitions of 108 green building terms, ranging from 'bioswales' and 'green roofs' to 'photovoltaics' and 'water-free urinals. I wanted to make *Green Building A to Z* a concise (and entertaining) reference to everything green. Written earlier this year, the book even predicts such developments as biodiesel fuel made from chicken fat instead of french-fry oil! Readers will also learn how low-flush toilets are tested and rated, as well as a Zen approach to green building design.*

Green Building A to Z also provides brief answers to several key questions: How large is the green building movement today? What is a green building? Why are green buildings and green developments important for the environmental and economic challenges we face in the early 21st century? What are the important new sustainable technologies that are influencing the building industry? How do green products and green buildings actually get designed and built? What can I do in my company, my home and my city to further the “green building revolution”?

I see that you included terms that aren't traditionally associated with conventional buildings, such as Feng Shui and Zen. Why did you include those? What do those concepts have to do with green building?

I also included a few terms such as Social Justice, Question Authority, Unbridled Enthusiasm and others that haven't been traditionally associated with building because in addition to the technical aspects of design and construction, green building is also about being forward thinking. The green building industry has advanced to where it is today because of the people who questioned authority, who worked to serve the less privileged and who have inspired others to do the right thing.

Feng Shui and Zen apply to green building because they are design philosophies that aim to harmonize people, buildings and land. Studies have shown increased productivity and reduced absenteeism in buildings that include elements from these two philosophies.

What can homeowners gain from this book?

In 2006 more than 200,000 new homes, nearly 15% of all new housing starts, were built to green building standards. This "green wave" is gathering momentum as builders look to green homes as a way to set their homes apart from the great mass of new homes on the market. Many of the terms in *Green Building A to Z* apply to homes as well as commercial buildings.

In addition to the an overview of green homes and the green home building guidelines, homeowners will discover the key aspects that can apply to any building green including renewable energy, zero-net-energy buildings, interior design, and salvage materials.

Many of the terms and concepts apply to residential developments as well such as density, New Urbanism, access to transit and light pollution reduction.

If you had to pick your favorite term or concept from the book, what would it be and why?

It's Question Authority, a term from the 60s and 70s. If we're going to respond to what Al Gore and others term a "planetary emergency," we have to question everything we think we know about building design, construction and operations. There are far better ways to do these things than we do now.

Is the green building movement gaining momentum?

The green building industry is experiencing dramatic growth; new projects registered for certification under the US Green Building Council's LEED rating system grew 50% in 2006 (vs. 2005 year-end cumulative data) and are on track to grow more than 70% on a cumulative basis again this year.

We've also seen a sea change in consumer attitudes toward everything green, including green buildings and green homes. There is a momentum that will sweep across the entire design, development and construction industry over the next three to five years. Firms have to prepare for this or risk being left at a considerable competitive disadvantage.

Is green gaining greater acceptance in the building and development community?

Over the next three years, we will see architects and engineers routinely aim for 50% reductions in building energy use from today's baselines. I predict that more than 2,500 new building projects will register for LEED certification this year and 3,500 will do so next year, to bring the total of registered projects to nearly 12,000, each with an average size of about \$15 million. Green building growth will far outpace the general growth of the building industry over the next five years.

Looking even further into the future, the industry will begin looking at how to move beyond LEED requirements and toward buildings and neighborhoods that are "restorative" or "regenerative." We will start seeing "intelligent buildings;" buildings that provide all of their own power and water as well as restore habitats.

What led you to be a green building advocate?

I have spent most of my career engaged in energy and environmental affairs, working to make our current economy and way of life more appropriate to long-term sustainability. I see my role as a communicator between green building professionals and the larger business and governmental public. This is my passion, and I want to share it with others. Together we can make this transformation happen.

How can green buildings make a difference in terms of global climate change?

The greatest sources of carbon dioxide emissions are vehicles and the electricity generated to run buildings. These emissions are the primary cause of climate change. Green buildings can reduce carbon emissions by about 40% compared to conventional buildings.

What aspects of green building do you feel are most misunderstood or underutilized?

Cost is the biggest obstacle for green building right now because there is a perception that green buildings cost more. Cost is obviously the single most important factor in development and construction. And it is true: Between 2000 and 2005, green projects were more costly than conventional projects. However, this was largely because the transition to new methods of design and construction involved a lot of social learning that was accompanied by construction mistakes, poor designs, unproven new products and a myriad of reasons leading to extra costs. We're past that stage now.

In 2005 and 2006, many design and construction teams had done enough green projects to start lowering costs to conventional levels.

Jerry Yudelson is the author of [Green Building A to Z: Understanding the Language of Green Building](#) (New Society Publishers, 2007) and five other books on green buildings and green marketing. He can be reached through his web site at www.greenbuildconsult.com.