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Seeing green

Fort Worth builder embraces enviro-friendly designs

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Reporter

Don **Ferrier's** green efforts continues to earn national acclaim.

Since 1984, the Fort Worth home builder has won awards for embracing environmentally friendly design that cuts utility costs and minimizes ecological impact.

Those design attributes in a remodeled 1938 home in Fort Worth's Arlington Heights neighborhood helped the company nab Remodeler of the Year honors at the 2012 National Association of Home Builders International Builders Show in Orlando, Fla. The Fort Worth firm also won silver and gold honors for new home in a hot climate and a home remodel in a hot climate, respectively.

In fact, a steady string of industry honors since 2002 has made **Ferrier Builders Inc.** a hotly sought-after firm for those wanting to save money on energy costs.

"Ever since the economy tanked, the number of new homes being built has dwindled," said **Ferrier**, whose new home inventory has remained steady while numbers of remodeled homes have ? increased.

That reflects a market that's selling fewer homes while seeing existing homeowners renovate what they've already got.

How **Ferrier** has met that demand led the National Association of Home Builders Research Center and the U.S. Department of Energy to honor **Ferrier Builders** at the Orlando event. Judges reviewed gold award winners in this year's existing home category before choosing **Ferrier** as the company "that best typifies energy value and reflects the goals of the award program," according to the national association.

"They just had the whole package," said Amber Wood, program manager of energy efficiency at the National Association of Home Builders in Washington, D.C. For form and function, Wood credited the Fort Worth firm for tackling all aspects of home improvement.

"Not only did they consider the building science aspect of it, but livability as well," Wood said. For example, **Ferrier** remodeled kitchen wall space to add functionality while adding energy-efficient appliances and lighting to accentuate visual design.

"Another thing that was important was the fact that, particularly with the judges, the story of them [Ferrier] being a new home builder and doing remodeling projects was also actually a consideration," Wood added.

Research Center President Michael Luzier called **Ferrier** "pioneers in their field." In a news release, Luzier spoke optimistically about green construction's future. "Clearly, the home building industry's efforts to make energy-efficient and green home options more available to homeowners at all market levels have taken hold," Luzier said.

That's not expected to change, according to a market study on green home building and



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remodeling. Single-family residential construction featuring green features has risen in recent years, claiming 2 percent of the single-family home construction market in 2005 and 17 percent in 2011, according to a study conducted by McGraw-Hill Construction Market Forecasting Service.

That 17 percent figure reflects a \$17 billion market opportunity in a green movement that **Ferrier** said is establishing itself as a new norm. Homeowners are increasingly seeking ways to save energy, trim utility bills and seek green construction trends.

But what exactly constitutes green construction?

No specific definition exists, but some industry representatives cite homes that use strategies such as insulation to reducing energy loads, environmentally friendly products such as those made with recycled materials and help to conserve energy such as air leaks in the construction of the home.

Customers hoping to find and fix those leaks have kept **Ferrier** busy. Filling his daily schedule are energy audits conducted to find air and water leaks and other structural weaknesses that may boost utility expenses. Customers pay between \$400 and \$600 for each audit, with more lining up to make their homes as airtight as possible.

While a slow economy has led more customers to seek **Ferrier's** services, green energy is nothing new. When an oil embargo in the mid '70s gave U.S. motorists sticker shock, they sought any way to stretch a buck.

"That was the beginning of a movement to not just build energy-efficient homes, but extremely energy-efficient homes," **Ferrier** said.

While many home builders offer energy audits, **Ferrier** goes several steps further in retrofitting residences for energy savings. For example, it uses door blower tests to determine the tightness of air ducts. Similar diagnostics help detect attic air leaks since 30 percent of heat is lost through the roof, according to the Department of Energy.

Ferrier handles projects big and small, from \$5,000 undertakings to \$200,000-plus endeavors.

"Most of them want to do a large remodel to be as energy-efficient as they can," said **Ferrier**, who described construction options as unlimited. "Green construction is wide open."



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