

Preface

During 2006 and 2007, the new home market tanked throughout the US, with new home starts in California, for example, falling 23 percent in 2006 and an additional 9 percent through the first half of 2007. At the same time, crude oil futures in the winter of 2008 closed at record highs, above \$100 per barrel, about triple the level of four years earlier. Al Gore's Academy Award-winning 2006 film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, brought home to millions of people the reality that our profligate use of energy is causing climate change on a global scale. And 2007's Live Earth concert brought the entertainment community into the global warming debate before a TV audience of hundreds of millions worldwide.

For the first time in a generation, the American public is concerned about the costs of natural gas, heating oil, propane and electricity for home operations and the price of gasoline for their cars, RVs, SUVs and pickups. Moreover, the public is becoming ever more aware of and concerned about the environmental effects of high levels of energy consumption; we're all beginning to see this concern reflected in a never-ending spate of news articles about the growing trend toward supporting green homes, installing compact fluorescent light bulbs and buying green power.

A new home is the most complex and expensive purchase of most people's lives. You want it to meet all your needs and not be a burden on the planet. In the midst of the homebuilding slowdown of 2006 and 2007 and the mortgage market debacle of 2007, the homebuilding industry began to respond to this green wave of concern. In 2006 more than 200,000 new homes, about 15 percent of all new single-family housing starts, were built to ENERGY STAR® and other green building standards. In 2007 and 2008 this wave gathered momentum as builders looked to green homes as a way to set their offerings apart from the great mass of new homes on the market.

From Seattle to Miami, from Southern California to New England, from unexpected places such as Houston, Las Vegas, Norman (Oklahoma),

Rocklin (California), New York City and northern New Jersey, green home developments are rising like wildflowers in spring. But how can you, the homebuyer, make sense of all the green home rating systems out there, including ENERGY STAR®, California Green Builder, Built Green Colorado, EarthCraft, Earth Advantage, Austin Energy, LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), Environments for Living, the National Association of Home Builders' *National Green Building Program*, the Green Building Initiative and some 60 additional local, regional and national rating systems for homes?

How can you decide which is more important, an energy-efficient home, a water-conserving home with dual-flush toilets, a “healthy” home with better air filtration, a solar-powered home, a walkable and bicycle-friendly community, recycled-content carpet and countertops, sustainably harvested wood cabinets, recycled-glass countertops and a hundred other variations on the green home theme? If you want all of these features, who's offering them? How much extra should you expect to pay for these features in a green home when it's getting harder to buy a home, as mortgage lenders are tightening standards right and left? What about warranties and insurance, maintenance and operational issues that might come with home features with which you're not familiar?

More importantly, where in this great land do you find a green home? If you're looking to buy a home now, where should you look to find a home builder with green homes for sale? Which rating systems should you trust, and what should be your bottom line for energy savings? How will you find a mortgage that will take these savings into account, to determine if your income qualifies for the home you want?

I wrote *Choosing Green* with you, the homebuyer, in mind and attempt to answer these questions, so that you'll feel comfortable looking for and buying a green home. I've spent my entire professional career engaged with energy and environmental issues, and for the past ten years, I've been involved daily with the design, construction and operation of residential and commercial green buildings. I've chaired the green building industry's largest conference, Greenbuild, for five years and have attended dozens of conferences, seminars, workshops, meetings and other events centered on green buildings. Last year I wrote *Green Building A to Z*, which defines 108 terms used in green building. My goal in all of these activities has been, first, to understand everything I could about green buildings, and second, to report back to various audiences how to make sense out of a field that's growing 75 percent a year.

Let *Choosing Green* be your guide to good green homes. In this book I'll show you first why choosing a green home is important for you, your family and your community, and, in some small but not insignificant measure, for the planet. Then I'll take you on a nationwide tour of green-home developments, interviewing builders, homeowners, green-technology mavens, government officials and home rating system specialists. I'll show you what's in a green home, from the most basic energy-efficiency measures, to the most elaborate solar-power systems. I'll explain green products, systems and technologies that you might encounter in your green home search, and I'll help you make sense out of them and decide which might be important for your home. I'll explain the most important green-home rating programs, tell you who sponsors them and how they can help you decide how much credence to put in a builder's claims of "greenness."

I'll show you some of the many government, utility and financial incentives for buying a green home and, if you're in the market for something other than a detached single-family home, help you locate townhouses and condominium towers in various places around the US and Canada. There are checklists and scorecards to facilitate your green-home search and give you a list of questions to ask at the model home or sales office. You might be surprised to learn that thousands of real estate salespeople, agents and brokers are learning about green homes at the same time you are. I'll show you how to decide if a homebuilder's operations are truly "green" or just make-believe green, also known as "greenwashing."

Finally, I'll show you how to do your homework, highlighting the most valuable books, magazines, online newsletters and websites to help you get your green home search off to a quick start. So, grab a cup of shade-grown, organic, fair-trade coffee, put in a dollop of organic nonfat milk and some natural sweetener, kick back and let me help you find a "good green home" that's just right for you and your family.

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— Jerry Yudelson
Tucson, Arizona
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