

Timber Frames Are Green



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Timber Frames are Green

First, let me attempt to define green. Almost every imaginable slice of the building industry has claimed to be green even if it means only the use of wood or bamboo flooring or "organic" cellulose for insulation.

To be green, a building should be durable, flexible, efficient, sustainable in all implications, and well built. Looking at these attributes, a thoughtful person might think "Aha! Quality!"

Lets take a step back to look at buildings which have been successful for centuries (ie., lived in, useful, and enjoyed). Many timber frame buildings, residential and otherwise, have been in use for centuries in Europe, Japan, and North America. Indeed, most structures built were timber frame until the advent of cheap nails and water or steam power to mass produce small dimension lumber, about 1845. Since then, the quality of framing construction, in general, has deteriorated. Consider the need to hold the corners together with plywood in many current frames.

Timber frame buildings last remarkably well. They are inherently strong, and wooden pegs do not rust. Part of this tendency to last well is the framer's skill and desire to create a showpiece for centuries, and the homeowner's pride in the ownership of such a building. With today's improved roofing, flashing, and other materials, modern timber frames are likely to outlast their forebears which have lasted centuries.



Flexibility is another important quality. There are no load bearing walls in a timber frame, so walls may be moved or removed as the need arises, easily, with no concern of weakening the structure of the building. Even if the building is razed, the timbers may easily be recycled.

Efficiency is of paramount importance with energy costs high and rising. The current best insulation, structural insulated panels or SIPS, was first used by Frank Lloyd Wright, and later by the refrigeration industry for walk-in refrigeration units. Now these extremely efficient panels are used on the walls and roofs of timber frames to produce very strong and durable insulating envelopes around the building.

This results in remarkably decreased costs of heating and cooling. Often, to encourage efficient building, there are tax credits on the local, state, and federal levels as well as local electric company discounts for buildings qualifying for the LEED or Healthy Built Homes programs. Your accountant can provide advice on this. Please click on the links below for more information.

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Hers or Home Energy Rating System www.energy.ca.gov/HERS/index.html

www.healthybulthomes.org

Energy Star www.energystar.gov

LEED www.usgbc.org