

# What is a Sustainable House?

By Mark Fielding

That's a question many will be asking while reading this publication - suddenly the word sustainable is hip not hippy<sup>1</sup>

Now is the time for so-called 'green' architects to finally put their frustrations aside as their newly receptive clients accept house designs that are wonderfully comfortable, naturally durable, self heating and cooling, healthier to live in, and don't contribute to the decline of the planet in their manufacture, use or eventual destruction - and even cost less to run.

Suddenly one realises it is ludicrous to design anything *but* all of the above. That being such common sense, perhaps Sustainable Design is not a recent concept after all - just one that succumbed to our modern age. And fortunately an idea we can easily rejuvenate, because a *Sustainable House - has less impact on the environment, is healthier and more comfortable to live in, and has lower running costs, ie uses less energy and water.*<sup>2</sup>

While every little bit helps, lets face it, making small changes will not result in a totally sustainable house. 'FULL' sustainability is much simpler to achieve than you might think and need not cost more than a 'standard' house of the same size - its just common sense and careful design. For example -

**SITE SELECTION:** find a building site with as much sunshine as you can get all year round - at least from 9am to 4pm in

the winter, with good shelter from cold winds.

**SITE USE:** your 'Sustainable Designer' will recommend the best location to maximise benefits and minimise hazards.

**PASSIVE DESIGN:** it means just that - you don't have to do anything, and there are no maintenance or running costs either. The careful design of the building and its selection of materials will provide most or all of the quality comfort you need.

**WATER USE:** plenty we can do here; store rainwater, recycle 'grey' water for flushing toilets or better still install a composting toilet.

**MATERIAL USE:** why use materials from the other side of the world? Or materials that use a lot of energy to manufacture, that have toxic chemicals in them, which from their sourcing or disposal deplete or pollute natural resources? We don't need to, there are alternatives.

**ENERGY USE:** our region is blessed with so much abundant intense solar energy and it's free. Yet we still buy heating appliances and then spend more dollars on purchased energy. Maybe if we had to 'pay' for sunshine, more people would use it.

I care passionately about healthy living and conserving our environment. I can 'do my bit' by actively promoting the principles and benefits of 'sustainable' residential design. You can find out more by visiting: [www.level.org.nz](http://www.level.org.nz) [www.greenhouse.gov.au/yourhome](http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/yourhome) and [www.ecoprojects.co.nz](http://www.ecoprojects.co.nz)

Quotes from:

1. Resene Habitat Magazine.
2. BRANZ Level website: [www.level.org.nz](http://www.level.org.nz)

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