

LIVING STONE CONSTRUCTION



FROM SIMPLE BEGINNINGS COME LUXURY HOMES THAT ARE SAFE FOR THEIR MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENT

by Sue Poremba

WHAT BEGAN AS A TWO-MAN COMPANY renovating bathrooms has developed over the years into Living Stone Construction, one of North Carolina's greenest custom home building businesses.

"We started in 1995," says owner Sean Sullivan. "My partner and current vice president, Frank Turchi, was a tile setter at the time and I was working for a builder when we went into business. The bathroom renovations turned into larger renovations and that turned into building homes."

Most of the custom homes built by Living Stone Construction are second homes or vacation homes in the North Carolina mountains. And living in the mountains, says Sullivan, he believes it is important to build responsibly and efficiently.

"Our clients usually live on the coast and want a second home in the mountains," says Sullivan, "so we try to impress on them that we want to be good stewards of this environment. We've gotten a very good reception on that viewpoint."

Everything built by Living Stone Construction is Energy Star rated as a standard of construction. "Energy Star consists of the insulation that you use, the windows and doors, the

participating power company for the life of the home, and it is transferable between owners," says Sullivan. "With a HealthyBuilt Home, you aren't getting any extra discounts or

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WHILE BEING A GOOD STEWARD OF THE ENVIRONMENT. ”**

Sean Sullivan, Owner

HVAC system with a fresh-air intake, as well as the appliances and light fixtures," Sullivan explains. "And then we give them the choice to upgrade to a HealthyBuilt Home."

In the Asheville, NC area, the HealthyBuilt Home has four levels: platinum, gold, silver, and bronze. "With Energy Star ratings, there is a five-percent discount from the

credits; however, you are getting a certification saying that your home is a HealthyBuilt."

The inspection list for a HealthyBuilt Home has 270 items in nine categories. "You have to meet a certain percentage in each category to even qualify," Sullivan says.

Sullivan approaches his building





projects with the idea that all homes could be potential HealthyBuilt Homes. Living Stone Construction, for example, uses prefinished floors in most of its homes. Prefinished floors produce no off-gases and make a much stronger surface. "It's more expensive than a typical sand-and-seal floor," says Sullivan, "but it is more durable and better for the environment."

Sustainability and environment friendliness are top concerns for Sullivan in all phases of the building process. He uses grouts, glues, and paints with low VOC. In fact, he adds, the water-based stains and paints work better than the more commonly used oil-based stains and paints. "They blend to different woods much better," he says.

Even simple things can make the home more efficient. "When your ceiling fan is installed, electricians have directions to hang it so many inches below the ceiling to maximize the air flow," Sullivan says.

How well a home is insulated will determine its energy efficiency, so Living Stone Construction uses icynene foam insulation. "It completely encapsulates your house. You no longer have a vented attic with a vented roof and soffits." Of course, once the house is encapsulated, it is important to have a fresh air exchange, which is done through the HVAC system. This way, the house is always "breathing" fresh air.

Throughout the home, Sullivan installs things like dual-flush toilets, low-flow

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water fixtures, and high-efficiency light bulbs. “We try to buy everything we can, within reason, locally, and we recycle as much as possible,” says Sullivan. “I was recently at a job site where they were installing prefinished

Leftover building material is donated to the local Habitat for Humanity. Living Stone Construction decided to begin green building approximately three years ago. “I wanted to improve on our building process,” says Sullivan,

in construction last year. And even if they decide not to upgrade to a HealthyBuilt Home designation, the clients do get an additional healthy benefit from Sullivan’s homes. “Many of our clients have allergies,” he says,

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bamboo floors. As they were opening each box, they were putting it behind them, on top of the finished product, to protect the floor. And when it gets taken up, we’ll take the cardboard to a recycling center.”

Sullivan also recycles in ways that benefit his immediate community.

“while being a good steward of the environment. The first year was all about learning, but now green building is easy.”

His clients certainly appreciate the effort. Living Stone Construction employs 11, works with about 45 subcontractors, and did \$5 million

“and this type of building has a positive impact on your overall health.” GBQ