

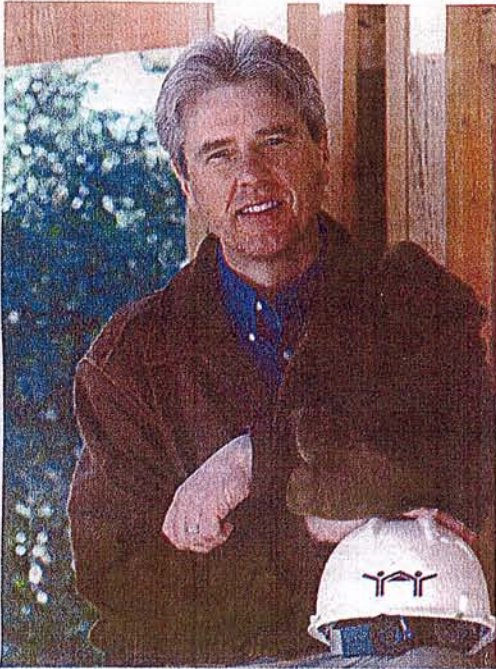


# City Living

PROPERTIES & LIFESTYLES  
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## Green, green, it's green they say



Joseph McKinstry says the green movement is a "balancing act" and needs to broaden its outlook.

### A conversation about the nuances of being green



Joseph McKinstry Construction Company headquarters on Beacon Hill, a formerly torn-down structure, was built enough, by the firm for itself in 2004.

### SHOULD I LOWER THE PRICE OF MY HOME?



PG 2

### LET HOMESHOW 2 BEGIN



PG 3

### SAF'S OCT. WALKING TOURS



PG 6

By Korte Brueckmann

In April 2005 Washington became the first state in the nation to adopt a "green building" law requiring new public buildings, including schools, to meet so-called green standards-of-energy efficiency, water conservation and other environmental standards.

"One of my hopes is that by showing the way, we will encourage everybody from mall developers to home-builders to use the same green building techniques that schools and other government buildings will be using," Governor Christine Gregoire said at the time.

The new requirements were expected to both help protect the environment and produce considerable savings in operating costs

Parallel to the mandates for public buildings is the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system for private construction promoted by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is a non-profit trade organization. LEED conforming construction is supposed to increase the efficient use of resources - energy, water and materials - while reducing building impacts on human health and the environment.

This is not such a new thing, though the codification and certification of building materials is relatively new, according to Joseph McKinstry, who has operated his Joseph McKinstry Construction Company for the past 31 years in Seattle. His company is a member of the Seattle Area Built Green

Association, a group that is dedicated to sustainable building practices.

"We've been trying to do the right thing for a long time," McKinstry said. "It's a balancing act. It's really hard to work with."

#### Laudatory goal

As an example, McKinstry cited a more environmentally friendly paint that was required in the California building code many years ago. Because they took many of the commonly used chemicals out of the paint, it ended up being a bad product. He said it did not spread well, it faded quickly and, worst of all, because the mildew retardants were removed, people's bathrooms began damaging their health.

"It's very much evolving," McKinstry said of the green building movement. "It's an absolutely laudatory goal." The problem is that it is narrowly focused on technology. The green building movement tries to have a small carbon footprint and use fewer resources, but it also needs to have a small footprint.

As an example, he pointed to 5,000-square-foot homes that comply with the green building requirements.

"How can you be green when you occupy that much of the earth?" he asked.

McKinstry has worked with Habitat for Humanity for the past 14 years locally, nationally and internationally, from Mexico to Hungary, South Africa to the Great Plains.

"It's very grounding for someone like me," he said. "It brings me back to what it's all about."

### Managed Forests: torn-down jungles

It is not just using resources efficiently, to really make a difference the whole building industry and the building codes must change, McKinstry said.

"The greatest thing we can do is figure out how to build homes," McKinstry said. Anyone can live in a 1,200 square-foot house, and even smaller. He has seen it in many places outside the United States.

"How can you build an 800 square-foot house when you have to pay \$200,000 for a lot and then meet setback requirements and parking requirements?" he asked. "It needs to be restructured right down to the very bottom."

Additionally, some of the certified sustainable materials now used in green construction are questionable, McKinstry said.

"I've been to Belize," he said. "I've seen what managed forests are. Managed forests are jungles that have been torn down. I have a bit of a problem with that."

Many people find themselves struggling with the products they have chosen to "be green" in their homes, McKinstry said. They discover that their counter tops spot; they have to clean and maintain materials in ways they are not used to.

"People aren't happy," McKinstry said. "They have been told that [the materials would spot or mildew or scratch easily] way back when, but they forgot. They try to make some use of the right product, but want to tear

it out down the road." That is a step backward, he thinks. When that happens the higher cost of building green increases because it has to be redone.

Dean DeCrease, founder and president of The Fourth Element, agreed that the green built movements needs a wider focus. DeCrease is not a builder, but his company promotes molding lifestyle to nature and reframing the concept of business sustainability by looking at how products affect the health and well being of consumers.

"I'm a lifestyle guy, that's the bias I bring to it," DeCrease said. "I believe every animal is perfectly adapted to its natural habitat. We need to create natural spaces for people that cater to their spiritual needs, not just their economic needs."

He agrees with McKinstry that the green building movement is a good start, but needs a broader outlook. Saving material resources is great, but doing that and creating a satisfying place to live with designs other than the large conventional house is important too. He said building codes should be flexible enough to allow co-housing, shared green spaces and other non-traditional designs that put less stress on the physical environment.

"That is one of the overlooked factors in green design," DeCrease said.

The Seattle area Built Green Web site is at [www.builtgreen.net](http://www.builtgreen.net)

Joseph McKinstry Construction Company is at 3304 Beacon Ave. S. Their website [www.jmcc.com](http://www.jmcc.com)

The Fourth Element is at [www.thefourthelement.org](http://www.thefourthelement.org)