

# Building Scene

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## 'Earth-friendly' homes are resource efficient

By Doug Funke  
staff writer

Geodesic domes, houses with several rooms carved into the ground and extensive use of windmills and solar energy devices are building ideas whose time has yet to come.

What has evolved are larger houses on larger lots with more but not necessarily "Earth-friendly" amenities.

Changes may be on the horizon, some architects say. The changes

THEIR IDEAS weren't that radical, but the call for downsizing won't do much for people today who want big and luxurious.

Smaller houses demand less fuel for heating and cooling and also preserve trees in the construction process.

"I think certainly we'll have to introduce industrialization of building," said Leon calling for off-site, manufacturing of larger pieces of houses and condominiums.

"Small parts are prefabricated,"

of the sun. Believe me, passive solar (heating) is very helpful.

"The other thing to look at is direction of the wind," he said. "Eighty percent of the time, summer wind is from the southwest and the winter wind is from the northwest."

So Chawney likes to angle housing units to take full advantage.

"You don't really need to use air conditioning," he said. "In summer, open windows and doors and winds will flow through the house. Solid walls or buffers on the northwest corner will protect from cold winds."

"THE BEST way to protect yourself from the wind is to plant large evergreens in bunches. A garage can go on the north end and serve as a buffer to the wind and cold," he said.

"If you're stuck on the north side (exposure), try to put living spaces active in the daytime on the south side," Chawney said.

LaGrassa and Olivieri talked further about insulation treatments.

"If the house is compact and the strategy is tuned to insulation in this climate — roof, walls, floor and in glazing — that would be reasonable strategy in creating an energy-efficient home," LaGrassa said.

That in addition to orientation to nature.

Olivieri's ideal from the outside-in is insulation board, then 2-by-6 studs filled with insulation, then a plastic sheet insulation barrier, and finally another two-inch insulated wall where heating ducts, electrical outlets and wires would be placed.

THE EXTRA walls would cost more, Olivieri said, but he couldn't provide an estimate.

Leonard Siegal, an architect and owner of the Farmington Hills firm of Siegal/Tuomala, said there's more to Earth-friendly housing than just construction.

"When I get down to the bottom line, how you get there has more impact than the house itself," Siegal said. "You look not only at the transportation system, but how you group things together."

"No growth tied to low density, large lots — doing that makes it impossible to achieve mass transit," he said.

That also relates to environmentally sound living.

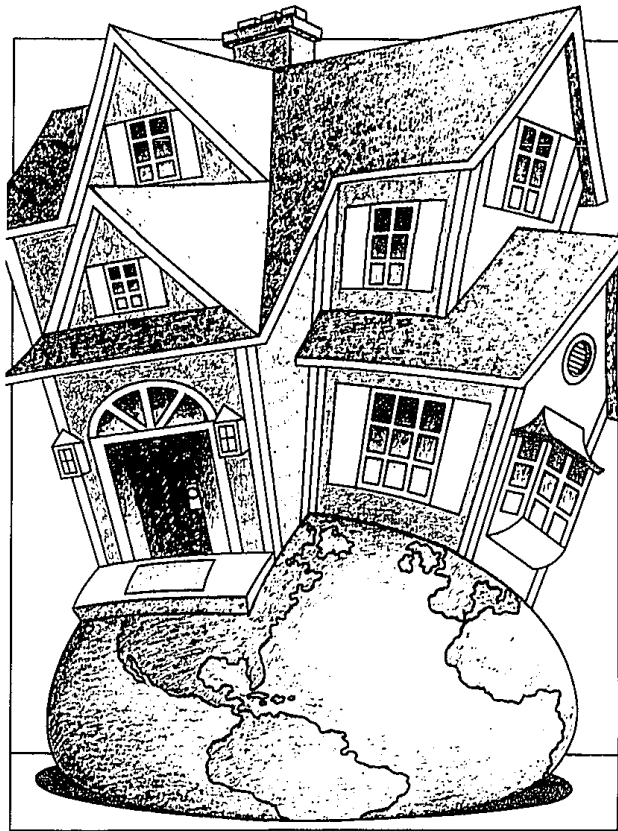
"Cost generally is a measure of resources that go into a product — energy, labor, etc.," Siegal continued.

"Building a house partially underground may cost more in resources and labor (than traditional)," he said. "If that's the case, is it really Earth-friendly?"

"Implementation of all ideas has to relate to a time and place," Siegal said. "Lifestyle, that's what they're selling in houses today."

Unless new or more efficient energy sources materialize, economies will force changes in lifestyle except for the wealthy, architects said. People usually respond to a financial pinch.

"Unless there's a great breakthrough in energy, you're going to have to have a smaller house," Olivieri said.



will be spawned by a realization of home buyers that the energy crunch of the 1970s wasn't a temporary situation.

"I think houses will have to get smaller. We waste so much. Much is self indulgence," said Bruno Leon, University of Detroit dean of the college of architecture.

"The (energy) problem hasn't gone away. We simply have closed our eyes to it," said Amarjit S. Chawney, a Birmingham architect.

"We're ignoring the past," said Stephen LaGrassa, professor of architecture at U-D. "When something happens, we'll be back to smaller houses."

So in advance of Earth Day 20, several architects were asked for specific thoughts on environmentally sound housing.

he added. "I think bigger sections will have to do it."

"I wouldn't use more than 15 percent glass," said Joseph Olivieri, assistant dean in the school of architecture at Lawrence Technological University.

"I would buy some kind of contemporary shutter that's insulated that closes off the glass," Olivieri added. "At night time, you reduce heat loss by half with a one-inch shutter. But it's got to be tasteful."

THE WAY houses are placed on subdivision lots also can make a difference.

"You should look at how the sun moves around the property," Chawney said. "The site I would select is where you can have a southern exposure for all living areas. The house should be situated to take advantage

## Refinishing floors requires skills, tools

By Popular Mechanics  
For AP Newsfeatures

Make no mistake, refinishing a floor is a tedious process at best, but it's usually worth the effort because the results can be spectacular.

Here's an overview of what's involved in the sanding process. You can rent most of the items you'll need for the job including: floor drum sander, disc sander (called an edger), and 36-, 80- and 100-grit abrasive for both machines.

If your tool rental shop offers the type of drum sander that sands close to the wall, you won't need the disc sander. Make sure, however, that it get close to the wall with the drum sander you will not have to sand a fairly large area across the grain. That would leave sanding marks which would have to be removed by hand scraping or sanding.

Before you start to sand, you may want to remove the shoe molding on the baseboard to better reach the floor's edges. Also, remove or set any nails that protrude to or above the surface and nail down loose boards. If you have a hardwood floor, bore lead holes for the nails, and remove any staples used to hold down carpet.

Fill any holes or chips with wood filler. If you plan to use a stain, use only a wood filler that will accept a stain.

If many of the boards are warped, you should first sand diagonally across the room to level the floor as much as possible. Take care to avoid sanding through the groove of the tongue-and-groove edge.

BEGIN SANDING with 36-grit on the drum sander. Keep the sander moving to avoid cutting dips in the floor. To end a pass, lift the drum slowly by pushing down on the handles as you move the sander. Never sand with torn paper on the drum or

your sanding will be uneven.

Overlap your strokes a few inches to obtain even cutting. Start at one end of the room and sand with the grain toward the other end. Make a pass over the entire length of the room, then lift the sander off its drum and roll it back to the starting point.

You may pull the sander back to the starting position while sanding another strip. However, the machine takes a heavier cut when pulled against the travel direction of the drum.

If your floor is very old or has been sanded numerous times, don't try to remove 100 percent of the old finish on the first pass. You can complete the finish removal with finer grit papers.

When you have finished the coarse sanding with the drum sander, use a small disc sander to clean off the narrow areas along the walls. Use 36-grit paper and work along the straight grain to the corner.

At the butt ends of the room (end walls), you will be pushing the sander across the grain. Keep in mind that the narrower the strip sanded across the grain, the less hand work you'll have to do later to eliminate sander marks.

Next, use a sharp hand scraper to scrape the old finish from the corners and to clean up other spots. Scrape with the grain whenever possible.

Intermediate sanding is done with 80-grit paper, and the process is the same as using the drum with the coarser paper.

Finally, use 100-grit sandpaper to eliminate all possible sanding marks. Remove any remaining sanding marks with a hand sander or scraper. This last step is particularly important if you plan to stain the floor.

## March home, condo sales ahead of February figures

The local sale of existing homes in March posted a 25 percent gain over February sales, according to the Metro Multiple Listing Service.

Metro MLS reported sales of 1,566 single-family homes and condominiums in March with the median price dropping to \$77,500 from \$79,000 a month earlier. This compared to the

sale of 1,350 units in February.

"The single-digit mortgage interest rates anticipated by most economists as an aid to spring sales have failed to materialize as of this time and this has had an effect on the anticipated market," said Douglas Courtney, Metro MLS president

## Seminar for first time mortgagees

Buying a house, especially that first one, can be a nerve-racking experience.

First you must have an inkling of what you want. Then you have to find it. Then pay for it.

And every step of the way there's that nagging question, "What am I doing?"

A free seminar explaining the process to potential buyers in easy to understand terms will be sponsored by the Western Wayne Oakland County Board of Realtors Tuesday, May 1.

The seminar, which lasts about two hours, begins 7 p.m. in the Holiday Inn-Livonia West, 1723 Laurel Park Drive. Advanced registration is requested by calling the Western Wayne/Oakland board at 478-1700.

This is strictly an information and education session with no selling involved," said Douglas G. Courtney, board president.

"We approach such programs as a public service that will help future buyers make the best decisions when they get ready to enter the market," he said.

Jim Waters, vice president and Farmington Hills regional branch manager for First Federal of Michigan, will talk about mortgages.

William M. Schlecte, an Ann Arbor lawyer, will talk about legal issues surrounding a home purchase. Ruth Clevens, an associate broker with Ralph Manul Associates-West, will talk about the role of real estate agents.

Those who attend the free seminar are asked to bring a canned food item which will be forwarded to the Salvation Army.

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