

Does 'good' equal sustainable?



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Why is sustainable design good? Why should good design be sustainable?

Fact: There is only one earth and regardless of your age, race, sex or religion, chances are pretty good that you're probably on it, perhaps with the exception of NASA employees. The earth has a diameter of 12,756.3 km and weighs 5.972 x 10²⁴ kg, meaning all the resources that we extract and use are limited within these physical parameters and are finite. The key word here is finite. When resources are used up, it's gone.

Ultimately, it's not just in your or my best interest to be sustainable, but it should be in everybody's best interest to consume less and reuse more. How and what we build has a significant impact, both directly and indirectly, on our natural environment. According to a publication by the U.S. Green Building Council, buildings annually consume more than 30 percent of the total energy and more than 60 percent of the electricity used in the United States. Each day, five billion gallons of drinkable water are used solely to flush toilets, and a typical North American commercial construction project can generate up to 2.5 pounds of solid waste per square foot of completed floor space.

The far-reaching influence of the built environment necessitates action to reduce its impact. One way to minimize our impact on the environment is through good design.

A common misconception is that good design means expensive, flashy and extravagant buildings bordering the realms of fantasy. In reality, just the opposite is true. Good design is simple, responsible and works within owner and budget requirements. Rarely is any building designed in a vacuum, void of any physical constraints or economic limitations. Every project is impacted by use, budget and building codes. Good design will navigate through these factors to produce built environments that are thoughtful, practical and responsive to the needs of the client, users and the environment. Being sensitive to the myriad issues will naturally produce a building that does more and consumes less. Therefore, good design is inherently sustainable.

One example of this is the University of Phoenix Riverpoint Campus in Phoenix. The design took into consideration the natural conditions of the site and incorporated many of the natural elements



The University of Phoenix Riverpoint Campus utilized indigenous construction materials.