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HELIOTROPE

GENUINE SUSTAINABILITY

We hope to contribute more than just words to this paramount concern in our industry. We believe great design is inherently about sustainability - and a genuine respect for place and existing ecologies. We endeavor to introduce our clients to the choices and opportunities around truly sustainable design while allowing each project to find its place along the continuum between today's practices and tomorrow's.

Designing structures built to last - from carefully considered storm-water management to use of durable materials to specifying quality coatings and finishes that increase longevity while reducing volatile chemical use - these are all inherent in our work, and are contributors to a more sustainable future.

We recognize however that this is not enough. In order to address global warming, the great challenge of our age, we must work to drastically improve energy efficiency in buildings. Buildings account for 48% of total CO2 emissions in the US, and more than 90% of a typical building's CO2 contribution over a 50-year period comes from its energy use.

Common in Europe, the Passive House model is one promising approach to designing genuinely sustainable buildings. The average Passive House utilizes approximately 90% less energy than similar code-compliant structures, and is so efficient that it requires no furnace or boiler. Solar heat gain, occupants and equipment generate most or all necessary warmth. Central to the Passive House is the observation that insulation is cheap, and highly insulated, airtight buildings can drastically reduce energy use and necessary mechanical systems. Principal Joe Herrin has taken the leap to become one of the Pacific Northwest's first certified Passive House consultants and is currently at work developing our first Passive House project, the Greenlake Residence.

Meeting this standard is difficult, time consuming and adds to the cost of construction. We understand it's not for everyone, and luckily there are other great standards—such as the federal government's Energy Star program—which represent incremental steps in the direction of the Passive House.

For more information about the Passive House and our endeavors to build one of Seattle's first, visit our blog.