

# GreenBuilding

## *What kind of house do you drive?*

by Elizabeth DiSalvo

Is your house a Yugo or a Mercedes? Would you rather your house was a Prius? How about a Tesla?

Before we talk about houses, let's talk about cars. With cars it's generally considered obvious: you get what you pay for. There are quality levels associated with cars brands and price tags.

But what does 'quality' mean? Generally, quality in a car refers to the power of the engine, how solid it is, safety records, the beauty of the interior, and, of course, the overall driving experience.

Traditionally in America, quality in cars has not been gauged by fuel efficiency, nor has it been measured by the amount of time the car spends in the shop. An Audi might get 18 miles to the gallon and be in the shop constantly, while the Corolla may get nearly 40 miles to the gallon and go for 200,000 miles with nary a trip to the mechanic.

In the last 10 years or so a change has been happening. The Hummer has been discontinued. Giant SUVs are becoming less of the norm. People are choosing energy efficiency, and not just to save the earth. Suddenly the Prius is a respected car. Why spend a fortune — never mind a good chunk of your time — at the gas tank? Why own a car that continually needs to go to the shop? Shouldn't quality mean an awesome high-performance product that has exceptional efficiency and low maintenance and really is a flawless product on every level? (Hello, Tesla!)

Shouldn't your house be the same? The great architect Le Corbusier thought a house should be 'A Machine for Living.' Other architects have used the idea of bio-mimicry for their analogy. Basically the concepts are similar. A great machine like a living organism is a super-efficient, self-modulating, low maintenance system.

When people talk about Green Building I think quality. I have even avoided the term Green Building in recent years. To me, building green is summed up nicely by a phrase



Trillium Architects transformed this leaky 1930s Westport home from an old "jalopy" into high efficiency "BMW," new insulation and solar panels keep it energy efficient.

—Photo courtesy of Trillium Architects

I learned from a Native American out west: Walking forward into the past. What if we use the latest technological developments in building and the old school knowledge of how to build well and create the most efficient and elegant 'Machines for Living' possible?

In the old days, a house was built of local materials, took advantage of the sun and any natural wind blocks, related

to its natural surroundings and was insulated, cooled and heated appropriately for its climate. Builders worked as efficiently as they could with the technology they had and houses lasted a very long time.

In the recent 60 years — starting with the mass production of the post-war era — that was all lost. Suddenly the same exact house was built for every state in the nation. And then those houses just kept getting bigger and cheaper. Quality was lost and replaced by what I think is a very poor notion of what a house should be.

It's time to turn things around. Start fresh. For many years now many of us have been guiding the residential building industry 'forward into the past.' Our goals: optimal energy efficiency, longevity with low maintenance, and coalescence with nature and inhabitant happiness. Like a living organism or a great machine, when things are done befittingly, they add up to a beautiful product.

In my columns, I will talk about how we can make this new idea of a house; the ideas and techniques that create beauty, habitability and joy out of efficiency. We will talk about why you want your house to be an incredible living machine and why it does not have to cost as much as a Tesla - why you might even get it for the price of a Corolla.

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Elizabeth DiSalvo, of Trillium Architects, is a residential architect with over 25 years experience. She met Mike Trolle, owner of BPC Green Builders (the contractor who has invited her to share this column), about 14 years ago when they were the only architect and builder in Fairfield County that a client could find who knew how to 'build green,' according to Elizabeth. She is proud to say that after years of uphill struggle, the green residential market is thriving. Please feel free to email any thoughts or questions to [Elizabeth@trilliumarchitects.com](mailto:Elizabeth@trilliumarchitects.com) or visit Trillium Architects at [www.trilliumarchitects.com](http://www.trilliumarchitects.com).