

# Columbia Communities: Where State-of-the-Art Green Building Meets Tried and True

## Unique Program Provides Green-Performance Feedback

By Scott Foster

For most people, owning anything touted as “the state of the art” is all too often a fleeting proposition. Take the world of electronics — compact discs, VCRs and the Internet — revolutionary technologies 20 years ago are now, at best, accepted as mundane accessories of everyday life, or at worst, obsolete gadgets or fads. Change rules.

In contrast, the world of housing has often been slow to change. Few builders have dared stray from “the norm,” due largely to uncertain consumer demand combined with the perception that building too much technological innovation into homes inflates price points beyond the competitive equilibrium. In other words, “the state of the art” has typically taken a back seat to “the tried and true.”

However, 21st-century economic realities such as rising fuel costs, dwindling resources and now an official recession are spawning consumer interest in a new “state of the art” in home building. That new “state of the art” is green building. For one local builder, Columbia Communities, it’s not that new. In fact, they’ve employed green-building techniques for several years now as part of their commitment to producing high-performance homes.

“We voluntarily jumped into green building back in 2003. We decided that it was good business. Good for consumers, good for the company [and] good for the environment, so that means that it is good business for us,” explains Jeanine Baber, Columbia Communities’ Director of Sales and Marketing.

She further adds, “Buyers care about saving money and they care about quality. Our customers know that they are getting a good value when they see that not only do they have a beautiful home, but also that it is quality built and designed to help them save on energy usage.”

**A stronger and better-insulated home with heavy-duty 2x6 framing and 85% recycled GreenFiber insulation**



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBIA COMMUNITIES

For Columbia Communities, building a high-performance home starts with an array of standard features that other builders might offer as options or not offer at all (see sidebar), but that’s not where it stops. They have a unique program that enlists the cooperation of their homeowners in

actually monitoring the home’s performance.

“We are very committed to building high-performance homes, so we wanted to be assured that our building practices are working. We decided the best way to verify the homes are performing as originally designed would be to approach the homeowner at the one-year walk-through and ask them to give us permission to obtain the kilowatt usage of the home for that first year of their ownership. Our homeowners have been very cooperative in the process and delighted when we go back to them to show them how their home is performing compared to how the home was originally rated,” explains Jeanine.

They then take the analysis a step further. “This process gives us a wonderful opportunity to walk the home with the owner and make recommendations on how they can cut down on their usage by turning

### Columbia Communities’ Green-Building ‘High-Performance’ Standard Features

- An electronically controlled fresh-air delivery system that provides fresh air from the outside, improving indoor-air quality while reducing dust and odors
- Two layers of 40-pound roof underlayment material — twice the protection mandated by code
- An HVAC system that is highly efficient (14 SEER), featuring ductwork that is tightly sealed and tested, and a pressure-balanced system utilizing jump ducts and transfer grills
- 2x6 construction, extensive use of environmentally friendly engineered wood products, Dupont Tyvek stucco wrap and window flashing for a superior exterior wall moisture barrier, and TechShield radiant barrier designed to reduce solar heat gain in the attic
- R-38 cellulose insulation at the ceiling and R-24 blown cellulose “cocoon” wall insulation (in some areas, fiberglass batts with equal R-value may be used) with no voids, gaps or compressions
- Energy-saving low-E windows with vinyl frames and thermal break
- CFL lighting
- Low-VOC paint
- Post-tension foundations
- Third-party inspections for grading and drainage and HERS inspection on every home, testing performance and compliance with both the Environments for Living program and APS Energy Star Homes program

For more information:

[www.columbiacommunities.com](http://www.columbiacommunities.com)

[www.effhome.com](http://www.effhome.com)

[www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)

[www1.eere.energy.gov/buildings/challenge](http://www1.eere.energy.gov/buildings/challenge)





Tyvek stucco wrap at the doors, walls and windows act as a barrier to manage moisture and control airflow.

off lights, switching to CFL, turning off computers when not used, to reset the pool pump timer, etc.”

Performance is guaranteed at move in. “We do have the home inspected and tested by a third-party consultant to ensure the performance of the home. There is a limited three-year heating, cooling and comfort guarantee issued by the sponsor of the Environments for Living program. In the event the home does not perform as guaranteed, the homeowner will be reimbursed for any energy usage above the guarantee. We are happy to report that there have been no reimbursements to date.”



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Most recently, Columbia Communities has signed on to yet another program setting the standard for green building: the U.S. Department of Energy's Builder's Challenge. This program is a commitment to build homes that achieve 70 or lower on the E-Scale, an easy-to-understand metric consumers can use to compare energy usage in the typical new home. At their current community, Riverstone Estates in Peoria, their homes are testing between 65 and 69.

Columbia Communities clearly illustrates that builders need not cling to the mindsets of the past and prove that “state of the art” and “tried and true” can be one and the same. ■



The homes at Riverstone allow for both beauty and energy savings.

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