Stewardship in Building

By Jonathan Feldman

When visiting The Preserve, one is immediately struck by the lush and varied landscapes, the abundance of wildlife and enticing views—all reminders of the importance of stewardship as we inhabit this precious piece of land. As we move to dwell in this place, conservation of our local land extends beyond The Preserve borders as a guiding principle for the process of design and construction.

Sustainability in design and construction can take on several forms, but we’ll focus here on two design paths which can lead to dramatic results: the specification of environmentally responsible materials and planning and design to reduce energy consumption. Finding and specifying materials that are “good, clean and fair,” to borrow terms from the Slow Food Movement, is becoming less daunting as green products proliferate and are therefore easier to find and less expensive than in the past.

For instance, Forest Stewardship Council-certified (FSC) woods can be used for framing and flooring, and increased spacing between the frames can reduce the amount of wood used. FSC-certified woods are harvested from forests around the world that actively manage planting and cutting to prevent
deforestation. Concrete, which traditionally requires the use of coal to create a typical cement mix, can instead be specified so that the cement is composed of a mix of byproducts from other industrial processes, diverting waste from landfills.

Design of a new home, or renovations to an existing home, should also take into consideration long-term energy usage, with efforts made towards reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. Siting of a new home can take advantage of thermal heat gain to warm spaces throughout the cold, and design of doors and windows for ventilation can eliminate the need for an air-conditioning system in our relatively mild climate. Active systems, such as solar panels, can provide most, if not all, of the home’s energy needs, and water catchment systems collect rainwater, which can be used for irrigation or treated for potability. PV panels have been consistently dropping in price so that the systems pay for themselves in a few years, and the design of the PVs is becoming increasingly refined to integrate with the design of the home.

As designers, we often speak about the importance of place and site, and The Preserve is a fantastic reminder of the pleasure and inspiration to be gained from enjoying the land and wildlife. As we build in The Preserve, it’s important to remember that the ethos of The Preserve and stewardship of the land extends to how we design, build and inhabit our homes.