

# Sustainable Design

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“Green” design, “environmental” design, and “sustainable” design all refer to the same topic often discussed today within the design community: how can we think of design as *environmentally responsible design*?

Designers may wonder what the issue is; after all, many aspects of environmentally responsible design are already common practice. Improved indoor air quality is becoming an important goal for most professionals, and many methods for achieving it are being incorporated into the general practice. Products that emit substantially fewer volatile organic compounds and materials that have substantial recycled content are common. Our buildings are far more efficient than they were just 20 years ago. Many of these elements have found their way into the regulatory framework that shapes the design and construction industry. Some of this change has come about because society has mandated it through legislation. Other aspects have come about simply because designers and owners have discovered better and more effective ways to design buildings.

Yet for many and perhaps most of the designers who think about sustainable design, these topics are considered design options at best. Environmentally responsible design, or *sustainable* design, as we will call it in this chapter, is not standard practice now because most of the profession remains to a large extent uninformed about the issues involved or the options before them. And if that attitude persists, the design profession will be unable to cope with clients' needs. The design profession has a real stake in becoming educated about sustainable design. In a few short years, sustainable design will be standard practice. Society simply has no other option. We live in a world with growing concerns about the quality of the environment that surrounds and supports us, that supports human life. Environmental threats are real and appear to be growing. The issue is not whether the earth will continue to be able to support life, but whether the earth will continue to be able to support human life. The earth has proven over many millions of years to be quite capable of supporting a myriad of life forms, which have adapted to many changes in the condition of the globe, from the ice age to the impact of asteroids. The question is whether the earth can support the impact of people on