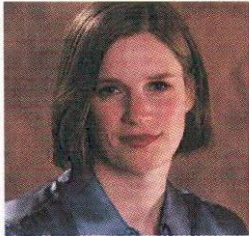


Brick by Brick

A new competition redefines eco-friendly building.



By Shelby O. Mitchell

Green building is more than a trend. It is now a real factor in the battle for market share. Designers and customers are learning to see through “green-washing,” or flimsy claims of sustainability. Having a greener product is truly a critical part of becoming specified and winning bids.

Groups are helping promote brick’s green attributes. The Brick Industry Association offers a Green Building Design and Sustainability course to educate manufacturers and distributors about the sustainable benefits and applications of brick and how it compares to other building materials. The International Masonry

Institute has a new Sustainable Masonry Certification Program for contractors and designers.

While education is important, the job of promoting brick’s greenness falls largely on manufacturers, distributors, and masons. Potomac Valley Brick and Supply Company (PVB), a distributor in Rockville, Md., is determined to further the cause. Led by president Alan Richardson, PVB is launching an international

design competition to inspire new, greener applications for brick.

“We want to get the message out that the clay brick industry is aware we need to look at new uses for our product and we are willing to go to those individuals who can find new ways to use it,” says Richardson.

The competition, called Brick-Stainable: Rethinking Brick, challenges entrants to design a passively heated and cooled building using clay masonry as a primary material. Entries will be conceptual designs, not built structures, with detailed specifications on the purpose, layout, and location of the building to ensure consistent judging criteria. PVB does not limit materials to a specific type of brick.

Peter Doo, former AIA Baltimore president and head of Doo Consulting in Baltimore, a sus-

tainability consulting firm, lends his expertise. “The idea behind the competition is to draw attention to the inherently-sustainable nature of brick and make it stand out in the clutter of products claiming to be green,” Doo says.

By asking people to design a sustainable brick project and provide evidence of how it will perform, Doo hopes to collect the data and create bulletins. “Our goal is to share these results with the design community so they know how to apply it and capitalize on it during construction,” he says.

Entries will be accepted until November. A jury will determine the winning designs. An awards ceremony will be held at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.

Laying the brickwork

Besides the obvious thermal properties, brick offers other sustainable attributes. Brick manufacturers’ investments in sustainability have resulted in a greener product than before. New processes, such as using alternative fuels, recycled content, and recycled water, create a brick with lower embodied energy. The wide network of plants often allows brick to qualify as a locally sourced material.

New product designs also lend themselves to environmentally friendly projects. At the request of its customers, Boral Bricks Inc. introduced a permeable paver with six rectangular voids around its perimeter for more drainage. When installed, the voids form a 1x7/8-inch opening to create a 12% void area per square foot.

Boral is also considering a design that achieves an 8% void space with spacer bars, or lugs, to maintain the look of a standard 4x8-inch paver.

Richardson hopes to build on this momentum. “While we’re in a recession now, we want to be prepared for what the building environment will look like coming out of it,” he says. “We don’t believe responsibility to build environmentally smart projects will decrease over the next five years. Product innovations need to be part of sustainable design.”



Brick fulfills aesthetic and sustainability requirements in all types of projects. The John J. Flynn BAC/IMI International Training Center in Bowie, Md., shows the beauty of brick, while benefiting from its green qualities. The project is in the process of obtaining LEED Silver certification.

[WEB EXTRA] For details on the Brick-Stainable competition, visit www.brickstainable.com. See www.masonryconstruction.com for more on sustainability education.