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Technology

Crafting the Considerate House
David Gerstel
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"For all the romantic talk about the joys of 'making something with your hands,' building is done principally with the mind," David Gerstel writes. In his fourth book, *Crafting the Considerate House*, Gerstel takes the reader on his own journey to build a practical, affordable, and environmentally conscious home. With a discerning examination of what we value in home and how we assess what it means to be green, Gerstel gets at the real dilemmas facing builders and homeowners today.

The author of two previous books on construction, *The Builder's Guide* and *Running a Successful Construction Company* (both from Taunton Press), and the owner of his own construction company, Gerstel is no stranger to the industry. *Crafting the Considerate House* is different from his previous books, in that it is specific to a particular house and thus rooted in specific regional building practices. His goal, however—to give builders and homeowners a more coherent understanding of the general practical applications of green building—is met. The reader is able to witness the author's intellectual grappling with the disparity between what is touted as green, and the actual impact of the many so-called green practices and materials.

Gerstel explores many debates—like that between preservationists and endorsers of new, green construction; or between "authentic" materials like wood clapboard versus engineered materials like fiber cement siding. Sometimes Gerstel makes choices that, while on the surface seem incongruent with green building, are motivated by a deeper understanding of environmental impact. He emphasizes the *reduce* of the *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle* mantra, the little word which is so often forgotten amidst the glam of recycled beach-glass countertops and repurposed redwood decking. When the public is assaulted by green building articles in every forum, a book like this, which takes the reader through the complexities of practical application and real environmental impact, is important.

Despite occasional smugness and a tendency to present his personal preferences as the

only way to maintain quality control (i.e., no nail guns, drawings done only with pencil), on the whole Gerstel's book recognizes with humility that despite one's best efforts, there is no perfect method, no silver bullet by which to achieve no-impact homes. Rather, "100 silver bb's" are necessary to decrease the negative impact of our homes as much as possible. In addition, Gerstel reclaims a sense of integrity for builders and laborers in the construction industry, so often disdained as non-thinkers. To build well, Gerstel writes, one must be "exceptional at seeing—Even on the move with tools in hand—the way material should come together for the sake of both efficiency and beauty."

Jennifer Sperry Steinorth