

About.com Home Renovations

Q & A with Nils Finne, Green Architect

By [Murrye Bernard](#), About.com Contributing Writer

Nils Finne, AIA, founded [FINNE Architects](#)¹ in Seattle in 1994 with sustainability at the core of his practice. His Norwegian lineage is evident in his designs, which celebrate both innate material qualities and an emphasis on clean lines, for an effect he refers to as "Crafted Modernism." Finne also designs custom light fixtures, furniture, millwork and hardware for each of his projects. We spoke with Finne about his practice, and particularly his experience with green home remodeling.



Nils Finne
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Q: *What initially inspired you to make sustainability a priority in your designs?*

A: I don't believe that there is a choice to design sustainably or not; it should be inherent. It's not just about using certain materials-it's part of our mission to create a better environment and it should be done in a way that puts the least amount of strain on our energy needs while preserving our natural resources in a smart and responsible way. So, I don't agree with the question!

Q: *On your website, you mention the term "[Smart Sustainable](#)"². What exactly does that mean?*

A: You have to ask tough, pragmatic questions about what it is you're trying to achieve and not get sidetracked. There is a [LEED](#)³ mania, a whole subculture or industry. In my opinion, this is nuts. It's an multi-million-dollar industry devoted to cataloging and filling out paperwork. Those millions of dollars should be going toward creating better buildings. Look, we are LEED certified and I belong to the USGBC because I subscribe to all the goals, but I object to the vehicle.

Q: *Have any of your clients expressed interest in LEED certification for their homes?*

A: My clients are very interested in the environment, reducing energy costs and using materials in a responsible way, but absolutely none of them have expressed interest in going through all the paperwork involved in LEED certification just so they can brag to their neighbors. You cannot self-certify a building; you have to hire outside [LEED consultants](#)⁴, which can cost \$10,000 or more, even for a simple house. This is not smart; that money could be going towards [rainwater harvesting](#)⁵, a [radiant flooring system](#)⁶ versus a forced air system, or [FSC-certified wood](#)⁷.

Q: *Seattle is in one of the country's most forward thinking regions in terms of building green. How can an architect or homeowner who lives in an area that is less receptive to these ideals succeed in renovating sustainably?*

A: Think local. That is certainly a very logical and obvious place to begin. It makes sense in terms of sustainability, but it also makes sense for creating a piece of architecture that is grounded and specific to the local conditions such as geography and climate. Local building traditions use local craftsmen and local materials, and in a way that makes sense and has held up for hundreds of years. Successful architecture

always looks like it belongs.

View a [slideshow of FINNE Architects' projects](#)⁸...

[Learn about Nils Finne's top six priorities for his green home renovations...](#)⁹

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