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Building in Circles: Green Building Designs with Mandala Custom Homes

Posted on Thursday, December 2, 2010 By [Maryruth Belsey Priebe](#)

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Home is where the heart is, and Lars Chose, founder of [Mandala Custom Homes](#), has made it his passion to make the heart of the home green and round. With a vision of promoting green building designs and an ethical business model based on the [triple bottom line](#) (environmental integrity, social responsibility and financial health), Chose has employed energy efficient designs, local materials, FSC wood products, non toxic finishes and insulations from the beginning, and his business has benefited as a result.

We interviews Lars to find out how he's built his green home building company and what he has to offer to aspiring green builders of the future.

Can you tell me a bit more about your Mandala Custom Homes concept?

Since we build just the shell of the home we do what we can by building the most

efficient shape, using local materials, healthy materials and by promoting the use of the



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most energy efficient windows, doors and insulation packages. Each home gets an [EnerGuide](#) Audit and Rating so that in the design phase the client can make choices to ensure their home is at the highest level of energy efficiency they can afford. As well, we support our customers to finish their homes by using sustainable materials, alternative power and in the way that they integrate the home with the environment they are building in.

We also prebuild the homes in our factory, which results in far less waste than in conventional onsite building, more accuracy and control over the building process, the working conditions are healthier for the builders, the materials are not subject to the weather, and the ultimate footprint of the house is smaller and more eco-friendly because the set-up is much gentler on the environment.

What did it take to get a business like yours off of the ground?

Back in 1996 I designed and built a round home for a client and was so moved by the feeling of being in the home and the uniqueness of the design that I started Mandala Homes in 2000. I designed the wall widths to sit perfectly on an ICF foundation and created 10 sizes with options to couple or triple them and have multiple stories.

A friend bought the first home and marketing into the local community got us going after that. It was a challenge in the beginning because of the unique shape and because we were promoting green buildings before they were popular, but slowly, through its many ups and downs we are now passing our tenth year.

How is Mandala Homes funded? Did you require venture or angel financing to start?

Mandala Homes was funded on my credit card and personal savings. At this time however we are looking for an angel investor to help take it to another level.



How do round homes solve environmental problems of traditional building designs?

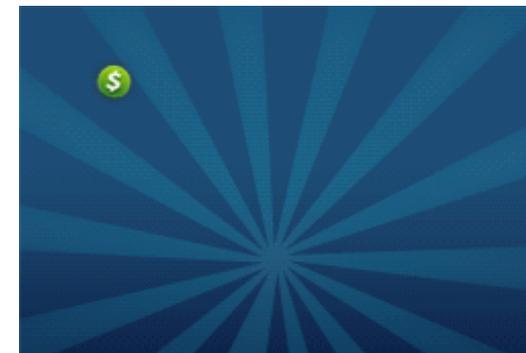
The round home is more energy efficient because of the thermal dynamics of a round space. Additionally, the skylight at the center is a triple glazed plastic dome that

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cools the interior air and causes that air drop, creating a natural air circulation of the warm air.

It also takes 18% less materials to build the same square footage as a rectangular house, thereby using less floor, wall and roof materials for the same square footage. The other environmental issues are non specific to the shape as they are related to site choices, water use, air quality and materials used in finishing.

Not all our homes are round. We have three lines of rectangular house: iNDwell, a prefab mod home; Lane and Coach Homes a line of laneway homes and Copper Mountain Homes, a line of Hybrid Timber Frame Homes.

Buying a home is a big investment - how do you get a potential buyer to choose your concept over other, more conventional approaches?

People are drawn to our homes for a number of reasons, the beauty and unique shape with its panoramic views, the central skylight with the radiating cedar ceiling; the quick and easy assembly of our prebuilt homes (thus less stress on the homebuilder and the relationship of the couple), the personal service they get with their home, our business model and our green business practices.

Who do you find most interested in round home designs?

People from all walks of life enjoy the natural shape of our homes. We market through print marketing, we have a [Show Home Program](#) (people who own and love their Mandala Home host open houses and provide information, the experience of a Mandala, and contact information about Mandala to interested parties). We have a [vibrant Facebook page](#) and, we have a beautiful website (www.mandalahomes.com).

How has the interest in green home design fared since the drop in the economy? Are people more or less interested in green home designs?

We have not seen a drop in the interest in



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green homes. We experience more and more people interested in green home design.



What is the most challenging thing about educating consumers about the benefits of green home designs?

The most challenging aspect has been proving to them that it makes sense economically and to inspire our clients to think in bigger time lines. We do this with our EnerGuide Audit that shows the effect of green choices on their monthly energy bills, etc.

How do you stay on top of the fast-paced changes in green building legislation and technology?

We constantly research new product lines and are regularly questioning our designs to keep abreast of new building technologies and systems that will benefit the environment and the culture of our conscious business.

What advice would you have for other aspiring green entrepreneurs interested in starting an eco-home building company?

I would advise aspiring green entrepreneurs to jump into an area that they are passionate about with as much knowledge they can glean about the green building industry. Then, keep learning. We are in an amazing time of change in the building industry. And, as always, watch the cash flow and stay flexible.



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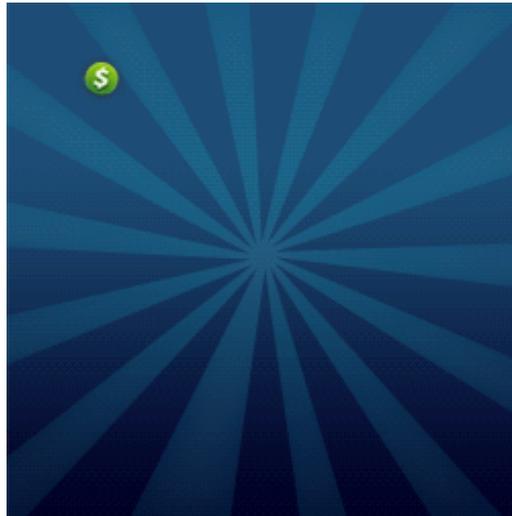
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This post was written by:



Maryruth Belsey Priebe

Maryruth has been seeking the keys to environmental justice - both at home and at work - for over a decade. Growing up adjacent to wild spaces, Maryruth developed a healthy respect (and whimsical appreciation) for things non-human, but her practical mind constantly draws her down to earth to ponder tangible solutions to complex eco-problems.

With interests that range from green living to green business, sustainable building designs to organic gardening practices, ecosystem restoration to environmental health, Maryruth has been exploring and writing about earth-matters for most of her life. Of special interest

is the subject of ecopsychology and the role the natural world plays in the long-term health and well-being of humanity. You can learn more about Maryruth's work at www.JadeCreative.ca.

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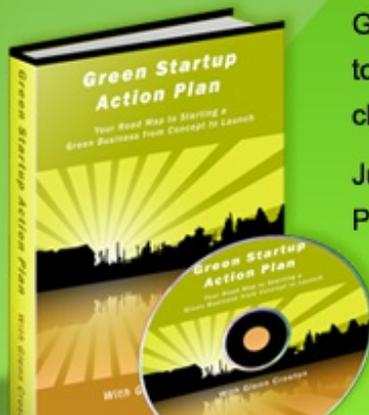
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