

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011

ANCHORAGE MUSEUM EXPANSION, p.8

A GOODE GREEN ROOF, p.144

BUILDING LEGACIES, p.131

# AMERICAN BUILDERS QUARTERLY®

## TEAM BUILDING

ZGF ARCHITECTS' DYNAMIC SELF-DESIGNED WORKSPACE, p.82





## **One Sky Homes.** Proving that designing an energy-efficient home doesn't mean sacrificing luxury

---

### **At a Glance**

#### **Location:**

San Jose, CA

#### **Founded:**

2000

#### **Employees:**

6

#### **Specialty:**

Single-family homes, whole-house renovation, project management, and consulting

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT THINK that shifting from a career in software to one in residential design and construction is a radical stretch. Not Allen Gilliland. A self-professed “refugee from the Internet bubble,” he founded his company, One Sky Homes, in 2000, after deciding that he might prefer a more down-to-earth job.

“I did a top-to-bottom remodel on a downsized home my wife and I bought, and rediscovered all the building skills I had learned from my dad,” Gilliland recalls. “It developed into a passion.”

That passion developed into a business with six employees and two to three projects per year, of which 8–12 months are likely to be occupied with the construction phase. Unlike many contractors or architectural firms, San Jose, California-based One Sky Homes offers complete design-build services—that is, an integrated approach to the design and construction processes, from the initial concept through construction and completion. This approach, as Gilliland puts it, ensures that whoever is actually going to build the structure is also around

during the design stage. As a result, both designers and builders are on top of a project's complexities, costs, nuances, and quirks.

“In the traditional model, the company that's going to perform the construction doesn't even see the design plans until they are completed and approved by a local building department,” Gilliland points out, “so projects suffer from cost, schedule, and quality issues.”

Being less than conventional is nothing new for One Sky Homes. It is, after all, a Silicon Valley company, so pushing the envelope is practically a requirement. And that's just what Gilliland has done. Since its founding, the firm has increasingly focused its efforts and talents on the relatively new (in the United States) field of high-performance design and construction. It's a field that, once it takes root here, could potentially transform the home-construction industry.

What exactly is a high-performance home? According to Gilliland, it's a structure specifically designed and built with the goal of providing exceptional performance

across several categories: safety (particularly in terms of indoor-air quality), durability, energy efficiency, water efficiency, sustainability, and comfort. Interestingly, the comfort factor—which includes thermal, acoustical, respiratory, visual, and functional elements—is what differentiates a high-performance building from the green-building movement. Gilliland is quick to point out that



and beer are lukewarm, nothing else matters. The home is a failure.”

Home performance, he insists, is a more precise concept—one that will ultimately resonate more powerfully and effectively with both the industry and its clients. To that end, One Sky Homes has partnered with the US Department of Energy’s (DOE) Consortium for Advanced Residential Building to build its first zero-energy home. Following a two-year design phase, the firm broke ground in late spring 2010; when it is finished and ready for occupancy in spring 2011, the 3200-square-foot San Jose home will be able to meet all its energy needs in a sustainable fashion, thanks to rooftop solar panels and PV systems. What’s more, the DOE will monitor the home’s performance through data-logging sensors that have been installed throughout to measure everything, from temperature and relative humidity to energy and water consumption.

It’s an experiment of sorts to see whether or not high-performance home construction is truly a viable option and whether or not it will catch on long enough to become an integral part of the home-building landscape. Gilliland is sure it will. It’s just a question of when. “The challenge for us is that this is still a small, early-adopter market segment,” Gilliland says. “We hope it will grow—and when it does, we’ll be able to leverage an early leadership position.” —Cristina Adams

---

From a homeowner’s perspective, comfort trumps everything. We like to refer to this as the ‘hot-showers and cold-beer factor.’ If the showers and beer are lukewarm, nothing else matters. The home is a failure.

**ALLEN GILLILAND, FOUNDER**

---

the movement has had a very definite, positive impact on the construction industry and that he is an advocate of sustainable building. But he also notes that many green organizations’ rating systems for buildings fail to include ‘comfort’ as a necessary performance criterion.

“From a homeowner’s perspective, comfort trumps everything,” Gilliland says. “We like to refer to this as the ‘hot-showers and cold-beer factor.’ If the showers

The logo for One Sky Homes features a brown roofline above the text "one sky" in blue and "HOMES" in green. Below the logo, the text "HIGH PERFORMANCE HOME BUILDING" is written in blue and green, followed by the website "www.oneskyhomes.com" in brown. At the bottom, it lists "ZERO ENERGY | PASSIVE HOUSE | LEED" in brown.

**one sky**  
**HOMES**

**HIGH PERFORMANCE**  
**HOME BUILDING**

[www.oneskyhomes.com](http://www.oneskyhomes.com)

ZERO ENERGY | PASSIVE HOUSE | LEED