

NZ BUILDERS WINS VIBE AWARDS FOR A UNIQUE HOME

Built with concrete sandwich panels, award winner is highly energy efficient

VICTORIA - At this year's inaugural Vancouver Island Building Excellence Awards (VIBE) sponsored by the Canadian Home Builders Association Vancouver Island (CHBA-VI), NZ Builders Ltd. took home two prestigious prizes. It won in the categories Best Single Family Home Between 1,500 - 3,000 sq. ft. and Best Innovative Feature New or Renovation. It was also a finalist for Best Single Family Kitchen under \$50,000.

This recognition came on the heels of several silver CARE awards in 2014 presented by the Victoria Residential Builders Association. Company president Damon Gray said he was more than pleased to receive the VIBE awards.

"It's brilliant. All my hard work has paid off." He added that every time he stands back and looks at Wain Road, his award-winning house, he realizes it truly is a good-looking home.

"I'm always proud of what we do. And as far as entering the awards with a house built with concrete sandwich panels, I'm really chuffed that it pulled through - it's totally different." NZ Builders has

entered the market on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands with a unique product. While concrete sandwich panels are used commercially on the West Coast, it is extremely rare to see them utilized in residential construction. However, they present compelling advantages.

The panels allow low fluctuation in temperature as well as durability and low maintenance, without compromising on great design. Gray said that a home built this way, can be just as beautiful and creative as any other building method, with the difference that the beauty comes with big savings in heating costs.

"Because it's so insulated, you don't have to do a complicated heating system," Gray said. "It actually has a simple, basic heating system because you don't need heat." He said that while some people spend thousands on geothermal heat and noisy heat pumps, he spent money instead on solar panels and time on situating the house correctly - and with no heat pump, super insulated walls and triple glazed windows, his house offers complete quiet, shutting out annoying outdoor sounds.

Gray said that he builds houses to last without a constant need for maintenance, which can be expensive and a liability in the long run. With so much going for it, one would think that this style of building would catch on quickly.



Damon Gray says he wants to help other builders with concrete sandwich panel construction

But Gray pointed out that change takes time. An entire industry has been building stick frame for generations. Concrete sandwich panels may be a superior way to build but the method will catch on gradually as people come to understand how the system works and how efficient it is.

He noted that when guests come to stay with him, they invariably remark on the comfort of the home - and that even, comfortable temperature is accomplished without air conditioning or complicated mechanical systems. The Wain Road house has been certified Built Green Platinum - the highest Built Green rating.

Gray brings his passion for sustainable building to every project he takes on. He did his apprenticeship in New Zealand. When he left, he worked in his trade in California for four years before moving to Victoria and starting his company in 2004. Since then he has built and renovated a number of residential and commercial projects. He recently completed a fully off-grid home on Salt Spring Island and is currently constructing a net zero home on the Sunshine Coast.

Gray noted that his total energy costs for the Wain Road house average \$75 per month at a conservative estimate, and he believes that he will soon be building energy positive homes - residences that put energy back into the grid.



Building with concrete sandwich panels is still unique in residential construction

In fact, his goal is to continue building homes completely off the grid if the site allows.

"And we'll do it for the same price as conventional building," he said. "I think it's sad how much demand we put on infrastructure. We put so much demand on BC Hydro and all the big items like sewage systems. You ask people where does your sewage go and where does your water runoff go and where does your power come from? No one knows. No one knows the problems we're having and the costs of these problems. So, for us, it's an environmental thing. I want my costs to be an asset, not a liability."

Gray is driven by innovation, strict attention to detail, thinking outside the box, and a focus on creating healthier and more comfortable living spaces. He said that one of his goals is to move on to multi-family residential projects where he can cut a landlord's maintenance and heating costs by up to 80 per cent with his method of building. He also wants to pass on his knowledge to other builders.

"This system could be part of their offering to clients. We can act as consultants to those builders. We're working with other builders already - and that's a good thing." www.nzbuilders.com



Damon Gray notes that highly energy efficient building with panels costs no more than standard building

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