

Norm Schreifels is building a 4,000-square-foot dream home with unimpeded views of the Sandia Mountains, an outdoor dining room that faces the Albuquerque city lights and plazas and portals that take advantage of New Mexico's weather.

Thick hand-hewn beams soar above the great room and windows stretch from near the floor to the ceiling to catch the mountain views beyond the river valley below. At first glance, the home would send any conservationist into a frenzy.

But Schreifels, who runs Sun Mountain Construction Inc., wants people to take a closer look. "We put a big house

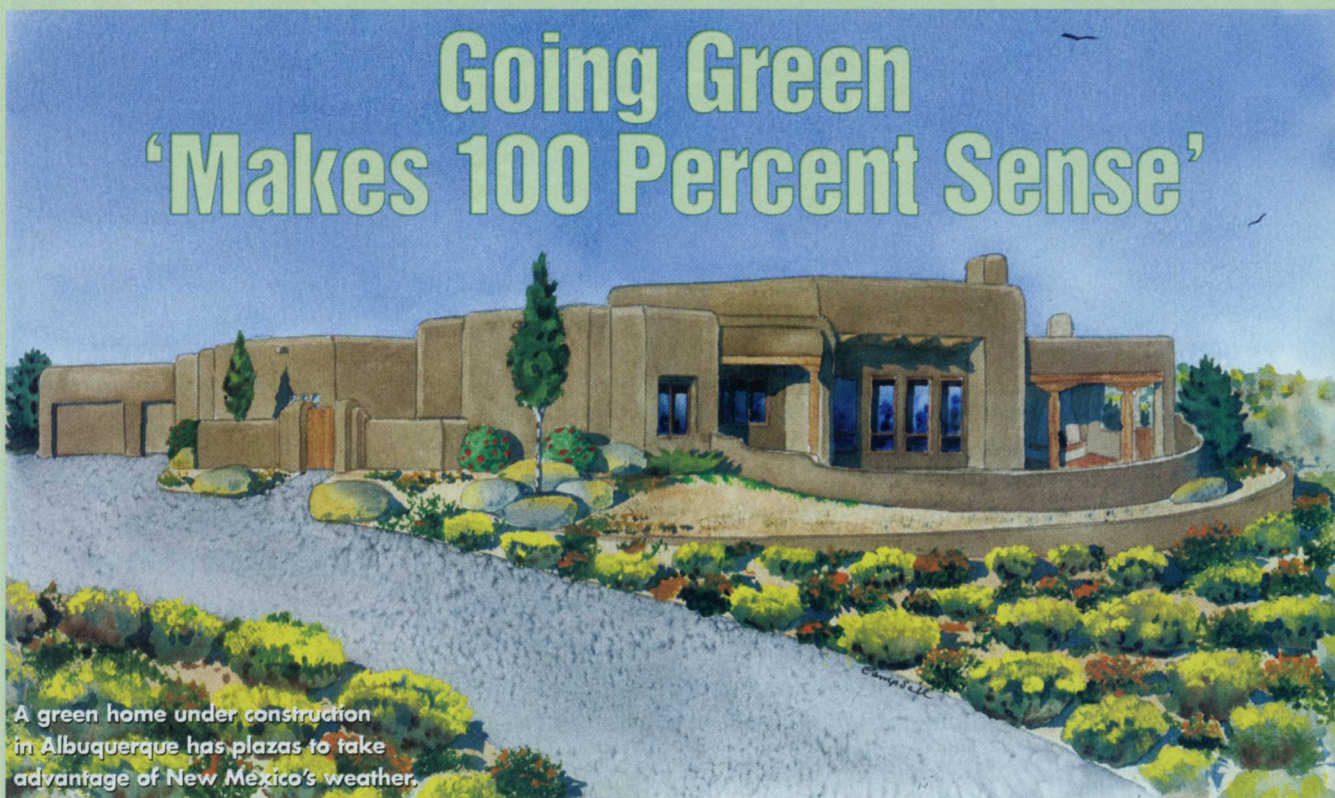
tion of Home Builders Green Building Conference. Dozens of them got the chance to tour the work of Schreifels and other contractors who are using better building techniques and environmentally friendly materials to create what some in the industry are describing as the future of homebuilding.

"Ten years from now it will be the way of doing it, not because it's mandatory, just because it's the right way of doing it," says Armando Cobo, an Albuquerque designer who has been active in promoting the NAHB's green-building standards.

Cobo has been designing nothing but green houses for the past five

power systems can be hidden on rooftops, insulation made of recycled material becomes invisible behind walls covered with nontoxic paint, and more efficient heating and cooling systems are woven into the home's inner skeleton.

Green builders also use framing techniques that cut down on waste; some look for opportunities to use salvaged materials. The beams and other wooden accents in Schreifels' home come from timber harvested following a forest fire in northern New Mexico. The wood is one example of the steps Schreifels — with help from Green Builder magazine — has taken to



Energy-efficient homebuilding picks up as fuel costs rise • By Susan Montoya Bryan

in here just so people would get mad and ask questions," he says.

The answers all point to green building, a trend that is picking up speed across the United States as homeowners struggle with high utility bills and leaders begin to talk about shifting the country's diet from oil to more renewable energy sources.

Hundreds of homebuilders, architects and industry experts gathered recently in Albuquerque to share their ideas as part of the National Associa-

tion of Home Builders Green Building Conference. Dozens of them got the chance to tour the work of Schreifels and other contractors who are using better building techniques and environmentally friendly materials to create what some in the industry are describing as the future of homebuilding.

"It just makes 100 percent sense," he says. "For a small amount of money, you can have a better house, more energy-efficient house. Why would you want something that doesn't meet those standards? It's a no-brainer."

And gone are the days when green-built homes teetered on the fringe of being freaky with a mishmash of recycled tires and aluminum cans and awkward solar panels. Now, solar

make the home a green example.

Some builders who cater to the masses are going green by engineering heating and cooling systems to work more efficiently, framing thicker exterior walls to provide more insulation and installing low-flow toilets and other fixtures designed to conserve water.

But NAHB officials admit the number of green homes is not high and they want more mainstream builders to jump on board. According to the

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organization, about 2,600 homes were built to some kind of green standard in 2002. That jumped to 14,600 in 2004 and it is expected to multiply again this year, says Ray Tonjes, chairman of the NAHB's green-building subcommittee.

Both Tonjes and Cobo note that the basic principles date back centuries to a time when people were conscious of their surroundings and built dwellings that worked with the environment. Tonjes talks about the Nebraska dugout in which his grandfather was born and how it was built into a slope to protect against the north wind. Cobo points to indigenous people who built their homes with adobe bricks and positioned them to take advantage of the sun's rays.

"That is a heritage that we should not be taking for granted and we should build upon," Cobo says.

To help builders, the NAHB created green guidelines that cover everything from lot design to indoor air quality and energy efficiency. The guidelines are flexible so builders around the country can use them. The Home Builders Association of Central New Mexico, for example, unveiled its version of the guidelines in March but with stricter requirements on water conservation as New Mexico experienced one of its driest winters on record. NAHB officials hope to see similar programs in more than a dozen metropolitan areas by the end of the year.

Support for green building is also coming from outside the construction industry. New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, former energy secretary under President Bill Clinton, signed an executive order earlier this year calling for the state to implement green-building practices for all existing and new state buildings.

"It saves money and it's a good investment for taxpayers," says Ned Farquhar, the governor's senior policy adviser for energy and the environment.

Saving money is also an aim of Schreifels, who expects his utility bills to be at least 60 percent less because of the green elements in his home.

"I think with the fuel cost and oil prices and everything going up, we're going to have no choice down the road, no choice," he says. —AP **WR**