

zHome inspiration: The Sensible House

I have come to believe that innovation rarely occurs in a vacuum, with a mad scientist coming up with something that no one else could see or envision. Even with radical jumps in design, there are prototypes, predecessors, and context. We all stand on each others' shoulders – there are very few if any islands out there.

And so it is with zHome. In particular, there are several of specific zero energy or close to zero energy projects that inspired it – specifically, the Sensible House in Seattle, and BedZED and Hockerton in England. I want to highlight each of these projects, and this will be the first of several posts on this subject.

The Sensible House was built by a friend and mentor of mine, Jon Alexander of Sunshine Construction. Jon is one of the very earliest builders in Seattle to get involved with green building, and is truly a pioneer. He began thinking about and applying principles in the 1980's. He is also one of the founding members of the Northwest Eco-Building Guild.

The Sensible House was built as a personal residence for Bob Scheulen and Kim Wells, who were directly involved in its design and construction. Bob himself has had a long time interest in green building, and maintains a [great web site](#) dedicated to the house and how it works.

I first visited the Sensible House just as it was finishing construction about five years ago. It remains in my mind as one of the greenest, if not the greenest single family home in the Seattle area. It includes double wall construction, a structural insulated panel roof, very cool triple paned windows from cold Alberta, as well as a hybrid water based heating system with solar hot water pre-heating. According to a presentation that Bob gave a couple of years ago, the house isn't quite achieving zero net energy – but it is darn close, within 15% of zero or so. Lots of neat green materials are included throughout the house as well. The web site is a great technical resource, and Bob has added additional information about the home over time.

I was in awe of the house when I first visited it, and continue to be – it is a very early pioneer locally of ultra-sustainable housing. It is safe to say that the Sensible House is a direct inspiration and parent to zHome. I want to recognize and honor Jon, Bob, and Kim for their trailblazing in green, low carbon building – without you and other projects such as BedZED, zHome would have been much more difficult to envision and design.

By Brad Liljequist, Project Manager, zHome, a net Zero Energy Townhouse project being built in Issaquah, WA.