



Durano Custom Homes
www.duranoconstruction.com
Founded: 1994
Headquarters: Albuquerque, N.M.
Leadership: Dee Durano, founder and CEO
Employees: 2
Markets: Albuquerque and its suburbs
 Closings: 3 to 4 annually
 Certification: Follows NAHB's Model Green Home Building program (gold level)
 Recent awards: Single-Family Luxury Home of the Year 2007 (NAHB National Green Building Awards)
 Company philosophy: "I want my homes to be a legacy. Twenty years from now, I want them to still stand true and strong and still be saving money."—Dee Durano

By Jennifer Popovec
Photographs by Patrick Coulie

New Mexico's **Dee Durano** makes a life-long commitment to green building.

Faithful Steward



When Dee Durano visited Africa this past summer, he brought along several bags of old clothes so he could donate them to a local orphanage. "I had owned some of those clothes for 20 years—since the first days of being married," says Durano, founder and CEO of Albuquerque, N.M.-based Durano Custom Homes. "I believe in the old saying 'Waste not, want not.' I've been rich, and I've been poor, and I don't want to go back to a life of want. So, I don't live a wasteful life."

Durano's philosophy of frugality is the foundation for his business. "I appreciate nature because it's something God created," he explains. "And part of appreciating nature means I have to be a steward of it. As a builder, I have a responsibility to take care of nature and conserve our resources."

All of Durano's homes are built to the green standards and have won numerous green building awards from NAHB, including 2007 Single-Family Luxury Home of the Year in the National Green Building Awards.

"Dee is quite sincere about his commitment to green," says Jim Folkman, executive vice president with Home Builders Association of Central New Mexico. "He's very dedicated and a

visionary in the sense that he sees trends and translates those trends into a product that can sell."

Humble Beginnings

Durano grew up in the Philippines, but left home when he was just teenager. He ended up toiling in the fields in California as a migrant worker, a life that he knew would make him an old man long before his time. So, when a recruiter for the U.S. armed forces encouraged him to enter the military—even paid for him to take the Graduate Education Development (GED) test—he jumped at the chance.

The Air Force gave Durano a way up and a way out of the

All Durano homes are certified "Gold" based on the NAHB's Model Green Home Building program and achieve the highest levels of resource and water efficiency, indoor air quality, and homeowner education.



Dee Durano, founder and CEO of Durano Custom Homes, built his first green home in 2001 and builds three to four homes each year. The homes, starting at \$185 a square foot, usually exceed 3,000 square feet.

fields. He spent 17 years in the Air Force, moving eight times and taking on a number of management jobs that would eventually prepare him to run his own business. He also earned a bachelor's degree and a master's in business administration while enlisted. When he retired from the military in 1994, Durano was stationed at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque and managing the base's \$95 million budget.

After his retirement, Durano found himself at loose ends. As an avid investor in the stock market, he even considered becoming a stockbroker, but decided against that because he didn't want to relocate to New York or Boston. Durano didn't start thinking about home building until he met a man at church who owned a construction company. Durano worked out a deal where he would work construction for free and get "paid" in experience, he says.

As an apprentice, Durano learned how to draw plans, deal with vendors, frame houses, and finish them from the ground up. Within a few months, he tapped into his savings to buy some land and started working on his first spec house, doing everything himself, from framing to trim carpentry to painting. Although that first home wasn't built to green standards,

Durano says it sold to the first couple who looked at it.

Over the next seven years, Durano built two homes per year, and, in 2001, he discovered green building through Department of Energy training for the Building America program. "From that point on, I knew I could never go back," Durano says. "If a person knows the right thing to do and still doesn't do it, he just committed a sin. Now that I know how to build a better house, I must do it."

Whole-House Focus

Driving around Albuquerque, it's hard to pick out which are the Durano homes. Scattered throughout different neighborhoods, the houses each have an individual presence rather than a cookie-cutter look. "I want people to know it's a Durano home when they walk into it because it's more comfortable than any other home," Durano says. "I don't want to build homes that all look alike."

Durano's homes, which start at \$185 a square foot (not including land), tend to be larger than 3,000 square feet and feature Mediterranean-style, Mission-style, and more traditional architecture. Currently, Durano is working on a





Durano's homes feature unique designs that offer plenty of room for families to gather. He also makes sure that his homes provide healthy environments by using low-VOC or no-VOC paints, stains, and varnishes, and formaldehyde-free cabinetry.

\$2.5 million home, one of three other homes he plans to build this year. (On average, he builds three to four homes annually.) And, after visiting Morocco this past summer, he has dreams of building a Moroccan-style home.

"Dee builds with an Old World sort of flair. His homes have extraordinary style and features," explains Folkman of the Home Builders Association. "He marries that style with green building concepts, which is difficult to do. It's that marriage that sets him apart."

Architects who have worked with Durano agree. "Dee is the most meticulous green builder I know and one of the best builders in New Mexico when it comes to quality of construction and paying attention to detail," says Armando Cobo, an Albuquerque-based architect who specializes in green design.

"Dee really makes sure that each of his houses outperforms the ones that he's built before," says Cobo, who has worked with Durano on eight homes over the past several years. "He's always trying to figure out what else can he do to make things better."

Durano approaches green building holistically, taking the entire house into consideration. "The house is a system, and when you do one thing, there are reactions and consequences in other parts of the house," he explains, making the analogy of a person who takes multiple prescription drugs that may effect each other—sometimes detrimentally.

Going for NAHB Gold

Durano's homes are certified gold based on the NAHB's Model Green Home Building program (only about 5 percent of homes achieve gold status) and achieve the highest levels of resource and water efficiency, indoor air quality, and homeowner education, Durano says.

Durano starts out every home with advanced framing techniques, framing each house by using 2' center stud spacing instead of 16". "This way, you use 25 percent less wood for studs, and when you use fewer studs, the stud is replaced by insulation, which means that the house stays cooler in the



summer and warmer in the winter," he notes.

Air quality is also a big focus for Durano, who performs tests on all duct work to make sure the ducts have less than 2 percent leakage. Overall, Durano's homes have just a .06 enve-

lope leakage (.35 is allowable). He also installs central vacuum systems to eliminate noise pollution and dust, and uses paints, stains, and varnishes with low or no VOCs and formaldehyde-free cabinetry.

Given Albuquerque's desert climate, Durano concentrates on energy efficiency. He orients homes to take advantage of the sun in the winter and to avoid it in the summer. His homes, which feature considerable glazing, boast low-E windows and approximately 60 percent fluorescent lights. He installs super-efficient heating and cooling systems in his homes, all of which undergo third-party testing and energy rating calculations to determine how much energy the house is consuming.

Durano also pays attention to water conservation. Tankless water heaters, low-flow plumbing fixtures, and xeriscaped outdoors are staples in his homes. However, Durano has yet to do rainwater or graywater recycling. "It's still a little too expensive, and the payback is too long," the builder says. "I don't put anything in my houses that doesn't have a payback within two years in cost savings in operation and maintenance."

Diego Ruiz, president of Albuquerque-based Diego Handcrafted Homes, says Durano sincerely cares about his clients. "Incorporating green elements into a high-end, custom home requires much more care and complexity than incorporating green into production homes," Ruiz says. "With custom homes,

Although most of Durano's homes feature traditional design, the building techniques and materials he uses are cutting edge. He uses recycled materials, including cork flooring and floors made from old tires and super-efficient heating and cooling systems.



Durano's houses feature water-conserving technology, including tankless water heaters and low-flow plumbing fixtures. He has decided against rainwater and graywater recycling for now because he doesn't install any technology that doesn't have a payback within two years.

you have to be more intricate because each space is different, and the approach is different. Dee really tries to give each customer the best product he can."

Durano takes green building a step further by educating homeowners after move-in. Each homeowner receives a hefty user manual that covers everything from air conditioning to recycling to public transportation. The manual tells homeowners when to replace filters, what to do with humidifiers, and how to maintain their homes so they increase in value.

Spreading the Word

Durano is not just educating homeowners, he's spreading the word to the housing industry.

"Dee never misses an opportunity to talk to people about green building," says Melanie Teeter, director of government affairs for the New Mexico Home Builders Association. "He is a role model, and when anyone has questions about how to put this in action, I refer them to Dee because he's always a source of information for people."

Durano is heavily involved in Build Green New Mexico, which was chartered in October 2006. He was one of the founding members, after heading up a group of home builders that evaluated different green building programs including the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) pilot program for single-family homes.

Durano and his group decided to adopt the NAHB's



National Green Building Program and modify it for New Mexico. This year, Durano took on the chairman position at Build Green New Mexico, and under his leadership the organization has doubled its members and now has a budget that operates in the black.

"Dee volunteers his time so Albuquerque is leading with green building rather than following," Ruiz says. "He is encouraging other builders to embrace green."

As the chairman of Build Green New Mexico, Durano

makes frequent trips to Santa Fe to talk to the state government about green building, even influencing recent green building legislation approved by New Mexico's Congress.

"There are a lot of politicians who are pushing mandates, and as a person who came from a country that was under martial law, I hate mandates because they inhibit creativity and free enterprise," Durano asserts. "We are the builders, so why not be a catalyst for change and stay ahead of mandates?" GB

Durano orients homes to take advantage of the sun in the winter and to avoid it in the summer. Many of his homes have photovoltaic panels on the roof and most feature a lot of glazing with low-E windows to maximize daylight. Xeriscaped landscaping helps to minimize water usage.

GREEN FAVORITES

At Durano Custom Homes, spec'ing the right products is essential. Here are some of the company's sure-bets.

> **Rinnai Tankless Water Heaters.** These water heaters only come on when homeowners turn on their hot water. When the hot water is turned off, so is the heater, ensuring that energy is not wasted. www.foreverhotwater.com

> **Rheem ECM Modulating Furnaces and 2 Stage 16 SEER Condensing Units with Humidifier.** These heating and cooling systems by Rheem are energy efficient and maintain steady levels of humidity, improving air quality. www.rheem.com

> **Variance Interior Plaster.** The Variance line is comprised of highly dynamic 100-percent acrylic-based plasters with select marble and limestone aggregates. Variance can achieve many dif-

ferent looks over a wide variety of substrates, interior or exterior. www.variancefinishes.com

> **Sanyo HIP-195BA3 Photovoltaic Panels.** These solar cells are hybrids of single crystalline silicon surrounded by ultra-thin amorphous silicon layers. The panels are ideal for grid-connected solar systems, areas with performance-based incentives, and renewable energy credits. www.us.sanyo.com

> **Demilec Foam Insulation.** Applied as a liquid, this foam expands within seconds to 120 times its volume to fill every nook and cranny providing superior energy efficiency and improved indoor air quality by eliminating air movement through walls. www.sealection.com

> **Benjamin Moore Eco-Spec Interior Paint.** A low-odor, low-VOC, 100 percent acrylic latex semi-gloss enamel with spatter-resistant properties. www.benjaminmoore.com