

Green Building Profiles: Austin Texas

Several cities across the US are noted for their progressive city governments and citizenry in regards to environmental issues. Known as “green cities”, they not only initiate and practice policies that promote clean air and water, but often promote other programs and practices such as alternative energy systems and construction methods.

Austin, Texas consistently places in the various lists of the greenest cities in the US and the world. The Green Guide, affiliated with National Geographic, chose Austin as number 2 on its list on Top Green Cities in 2006. Criteria for its choices included air quality, electricity use and production, environmental perspective, environmental policy, green space, transportation and water quality.

A commitment to solar energy and green building is what won Austin its place on Green Guide’s list. The city offers some of the most generous rebates in the country for customers who use solar energy. It also buys significant amounts of wind energy from wind farms in West Texas and plans to meet 20 percent of its energy needs with renewable sources by 2020. Austin also has established high standards for energy efficiency for its central business district and has initiated progressive policies to preserve water quality, ensure proximity to mass transit, and maintain a pedestrian-friendly urban design.

But it’s not just the city government that promotes green urban living. Many of Austin’s creative citizens are becoming known around the country and the world for their initiative and success in creating local, community based projects that promote green lifestyles and a more healthy, cleaner urban environment.

The Rhizome Collective was founded in 2000 as a center for community organizing and urban sustainability education. The collective took an old warehouse with an asphalt parking lot and have turned it into gardens, ponds and greenhouses that support tilapia, catfish, turkey, ducks and chickens. They host weekend workshops and seminars to teach people from around the world that they don’t have to wait on governments and corporations to go green, but they can start implementing their own projects with little background in engineering or the sciences.

Austin has permitted a number of private individuals to employ alternative construction methods to build homes inside the city limits, notably straw bale construction. In 2001, there were about a dozen homes in the Austin area that were built from straw, including at least three inside the city limits. In addition to such progressive construction methods, the city has also permitted some people to recycle old buildings, such as warehouses into condos and upscale or innovative commercial properties.

Another citizen-initiated project that has contributed to the eco-quality of the area is the Carshare initiative. This company allows members to pick up a car for a day at various locations around town. In this way, members can save money by not having to pay for their own private car (and consequently not having to pay for insurance, gas, maintenance and parking!). It also helps reduce the amount of air pollution in the city by reducing the amount of automobile traffic in the city.

Finally, there is Good Common Sense, an online store founded by well-known and highly respected Austin musician Chris Searles. Formerly a drummer for such notable artists as Alejandro Escovedo and Shawn Colvin, Searles founded Good Common Sense in an effort to help consumers make the kinds of choices that will help make the world a greener, safer place to live and work. His store offers products that are environmentally friendlier than many products consumers might find in regular stores and shops. Consumers can find home weatherizing products, compostable dinnerware, fuel enhancer devices, and all kinds of recycled products.

About the Author

Ki helps clients looking for green and environmentally friendly homes in the [Austin real estate](#) market. Potential buyers can use his site to [search the Austin MLS](#) along with using his [free mortgage calculator](#).