

# Is it Time to Remodel?

By Dwight Miller, PhD, CPE

Despite the slow market, Albuquerque's single-family home prices were up 4.5% in 2007 (NAR). Regardless, clients ask me about remodeling as an alternative to building. Real-estate agents and builders often encourage people to invest in their homes because it is good for business. I take a more conservative position, asking clients to consider personal factors such as recent changes in work, children, health, mobility, and energy costs. What is the **problem** to be **solved** by reconfiguration or expansion? I encourage updates that improve comfort, functionality, and energy efficiency, and discourage makeovers driven by excess stuff, style-consciousness, or "up-scaling." Hunt down unproductive space such as a packed garage, guest room, or outbuilding. A garage sale is easier on the environment *and* the bank account than new construction.

Adding square footage simply for resale is not advisable, especially in a slow market. Less is more, according to the LEED criteria for green building, and the *cutting edge* is tiny homes of 400-1000 square feet! If more living space is really needed, look first to inexpensive and energy-friendly patios, decks, sunrooms, and screened porches, especially if you enjoy the outdoors. Next, look to your south side, as solar-energy modifications can warm and brighten your home, reduce energy use, and possibly qualify you for State and Federal tax credits.

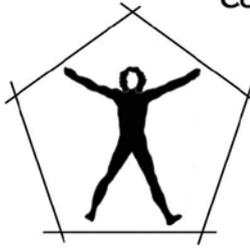
According to the *NY Times* (3/13/08), remodeling coaches are all the rage. I ask lots of questions, provide cost-effective, energy-conscious alternatives, and recommend only honest, reliable remodelers. More space is not always the best solution, but when it is, make sure it is the *right* space.

*Dr. Miller is an environmental psychologist with a PhD from The Ohio State University and an engineering degree from Lafayette College. While working in the corporate world he taught courses on environmental behavior and research at UNM's School of Architecture. He is also a Certified Professional Ergonomist and works with architects, builders, planners, lawyers, and homeowners on environment-behavior issues.*

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