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QUALIFIED REMODELER

# Green building One step at a time



*Erik and Leif Jackson  
Jackson Remodeling, Seattle*



## COVER STORY

## Incorporating green building into a successful remodeling business

GROWING UP AS YOUNG BOYS, ERIK AND LEIF JACKSON spent many Seattle summers helping their dad remodel something – whether it be a kitchen or a bathroom, their father was always remodeling. “During this time, our dad always said that we would both go into remodeling and would work together,” reminisces Erik. However, the boys grew into men and headed straight out the door of the University of Washington with business degrees in hand.

“Working as a financial analyst for many years really burned me out,” says Erik. “So, I quit my job and went straight to something that I enjoyed – residential remodeling.”

### How it all began

Erik and Leif both worked for the same high-end residential remodeler in Seattle. One year, FEMA came to the city and offered a training class on earthquake retrofitting. “After we both took the course, we realized that retrofitting could be a solid foundation for a contracting firm,” says Leif, “and we began our journey to become business owners.”

In 1999, Erik and Leif started up their own residential remodeling design/build firm – Jackson Remodeling LLC. Jackson Remodeling specializes in additions, kitchens, bathrooms, basements, and whole-house renovations. Their structural division, Sound Seismic, performs a wide variety of structural upgrades, and is known as one of Seattle’s most

trusted earthquake retrofitters.

The firm now staffs nine employees, including six in the field and three in

the office. One niche that the men have specialized in is green building, creating a reputation as one of the largest green building and retrofitting firms in the area.

### Building green

Those two words, “green building,” have been on the tips of many tongues over the past few years. However, this practice has taken a back seat to busy lives and a booming remodeling market.

The Jackson brothers have really made an effort since the start of the company to educate themselves and their clients on this way of building.

“We were really led by our hearts to go green,” says Erik. “My Aunt Ruth really showed me how to love nature and how important it is to help preserve what we have. To this day, when making decisions, I find myself asking, ‘What would Aunt Ruth Do?’ Since the remodeling industry uses a lot of earth’s resources and creates a great deal of waste, we feel an obligation to practice environmental sensibility,” continues Erik. “When possible, we use methods and materials that use fewer resources to build, less energy to operate, have a reduced impact on the environment, and support the suppliers that focus on using sustainable and renewable resources.”

This can take a lot of time and can be quite expensive to fund immediately. The Jackson brothers have taken the “one step at a time” approach to building green.

### Start slowly

“I began by researching on the Internet a few hours a night,” says Erik. “Then, I started calling around for manufacturers and other remodelers/builders who were interested in the green

**“We all have lives and family outside of the business, and balancing the two makes us successful in both areas.”**



In this dramatic kitchen remodel, the Jacksons more than doubled the floor space. Many green materials were used, including Marmoleum flooring and PaperStone countertops. The project was completed with a classic back porch of certified sustainably-grown lumber with natural borate-based preservative.

building approach, taking them out to lunch to talk about best practices that they were implementing to go this route of green building and how they got into the business.”

As Erik began his search for more information, he found a lot of remodelers, who like himself, were very interested in this way of building and seeking education to begin this process.

“Being a part of the associations such as Built Green and the Northwest EcoBuilding Guild really got our names out there in the public,” adds Leif. “These groups are also a great source of information on environmental materials and techniques.”

“We have worked on creating a company culture where we are known for delivering an ‘exceptional remodeling experience’ (that’s the meat of our company mission statement) and we have loyal employees/team members who share the same values,” says Leif.

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**“Building green is a commitment – you can’t go into it because of the bottom line; it comes from what you care about, not what’s going to make you the most money.”**

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After getting their foot into green building, the Jacksons began slowly to encourage their clients to preserve the earth and its resources. “We started off small, offering a few options and now we provide a pretty complete menu of green options,” explains Erik. “It’s a lot easier to slowly introduce this way of building.”

The first thing that Jackson Remodeling offered was formaldehyde-free insulation as an option. Slowly, they began offering other sustainable and renewable products such as FSC certified plywood and lumber, PaperStone countertops, and bamboo and cork flooring.

As their knowledge has expanded, the Jacksons try to create spaces that are efficient and healthy as well as being resource-friendly. Healthy hydronic heating systems, efficient lighting and on-demand water heaters, wood preservatives that are non-toxic to humans and pets, construction debris recycling, and fiber-cement siding are all regular parts of the Jackson repertoire.

After educating themselves on the subject, Erik and Leif pass on their knowledge to their employees as well. “We provide training for all of our employees,” says Leif. “We also send them to Master Builders seminars to get more information on green building and to trade shows that come through the area.”

### **Incorporating green into every aspect of the business**

Not only does Jackson Remodeling support the use of green materials in its projects, the company also incorporates “green” practices into their everyday lives.

“One step that we made was to include recycling stations and cans for cigarette butts on all of our job sites,” says Erik. As another part of their effort to protect the environment, the



**Before**

**The Jackson brothers transformed this kitchen as part of a whole-house restoration project. The owners proudly challenge guests to tell the new doors and windows from the restored units, and to determine where the old refinished oak floors end and the new begins.**



**After**

company uses B20 biodiesel in their diesel trucks. Biodiesel is known to produce far fewer emissions than fossil diesel, is less toxic than table salt, biodegrades faster than sugar, is made from renewable resources, and decreases the dependence on foreign oil. Leif continues this commitment at home - his family car is an ultra-low emission hybrid electric Toyota Prius.

### **Living a balanced life**

One aspect that both brothers completely agree on is living a balanced life between their business and family. Leif explains this further by associating the golden rule to both the way they run their business and green remodeling: “We sleep better at night knowing we are treating our employees and our planet with the respect and care that they each deserve.”

“We call our team a family because our employees really are like family,” says Leif. “Our team gets the same benefits we do: excellent health insurance, a retirement plan, and paid vacations. We don’t work 80 hours a week, nor do we expect our employees to — we all have lives and family outside of the business, and balancing the two makes us successful in both areas.” ■

## Our Mission

We will strive to provide each one of our clients with an ***Exceptional Remodeling Experience***. Our work, our service, and our attitude will clearly communicate this conviction to each other, our clients, and our colleagues.

## Our Work

We specialize in Seattle's older homes. Our colleagues in the Master Builders Association have recognized our quality craftsmanship with two coveted REX awards for Remodeling Excellence. Most of our work is the result of repeat business or referrals from our delighted clients.

## Our Service

Our design/build approach emphasizes value engineering – we draw on our experience to guide your decisions and maximize the value you receive from your remodeling investment. We provide a fixed price remodeling agreement before construction begins, and the same lead carpenter will manage your job every day, from start to finish.

## Our Attitude

What others see as problems, we regard as opportunities and we approach them positively and creatively. We recognize that remodeling can be a stressful undertaking, and we take care to minimize disruption and ensure that the project proceeds as smoothly as possible. We believe it is possible to provide quality craftsmanship and exceptional service for a fair price.



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