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Submitted rendering

## Meeting halfway

The developer needed a contractor for its 12 and a Half condominiums, and the contractor needed the project to be more sustainable – the compromise will be a cost-effective sustainable building

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When the “12 and a Half” condominiums project in Northeast Portland first came across his desk in January, general contractor Carrington Barrs decided not to bid on it.

“We turned the project down,” said Barrs, co-owner of Barrs and Genauer Construction, a Portland-based contractor specializing in sustainable building

practices. “It’s a good-size project for us, it’s the right type of construction ... (but) it didn’t have enough green.”

The project design, he said, didn’t incorporate enough environmentally sustainable practices and materials such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood and nontoxic paints and adhesives.

“I almost felt like I was being a snob, like, ‘Your design’s not good enough for me,’” said Barrs. “But our company has a

firm belief in how we build things.”

By July, the 13-unit building at Northeast Knott Street and Seventh Avenue was designed and permitted, and developer George Hale was ready to start construction.

There was just one problem: The general contractor Hale hired was overloaded with work and decided to back out of the project.

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The project's design firm, Holst Architecture, recommended that Hale approach Barrs and Genauer.

"So, I talked to Carrington and he started talking about green elements," Hale said. "At first, I didn't want to hear it. I've shied away from it because it seems so extremist."

"He said, 'We'll bid on this project, but I want you to listen to what I have to say' ... and that's when he went into his speech about sustainable this and green that," he said. "And maybe I listened more closely because he's kind of like me. We're the same age, similar family, I could relate to him. He wasn't some extreme liberal."

After the meeting, Barrs and Hale decided to meet halfway. Hale agreed to incorporate green building practices into the design and construction of the 12 and a Half condominiums if Barrs could implement the changes in a cost-effective way.

"He said, 'If you meet my budget it can work,'" recalled Barrs. "We did the give-and-take thing ... swapping the materials out. And we're still kind of analyzing (the options)."

Barrs and Genauer began pouring concrete forms at the site on Tuesday.

### Small changes, big difference

In the redesign of the 8,500-square-foot wood-frame condominiums, Barrs substituted FSC-certified wood and nontoxic materials for standard building materials.

"That lumber was harvested in a sustainable way, so it's not clear-cut. I don't feel good as a builder when I drive and see (clear-cut land)," Barrs said. "FSC is growing. It's a third-party stamp, and it's getting more popular in construction. It's not saying don't use wood, but use it responsibly."

Barrs will also implement strict waste-reduction and recycling practices on the job site. Workers will install the framework for photovoltaic panels on the roof so that the building's new owners can more easily purchase and install their



Dan Carter/DJC

Greg Capen, assistant superintendent for Barrs & Genauer Construction Inc., checks base plate measurements on the wall forms at the 12 and a Half condominium project in Northeast Portland.

own panels. And, all of the finish materials will be assessed for sustainability.

Barrs gained valuable experience in the construction of green buildings working at Walsh Construction, where he helped to build the EcoTrust building at 721 N.W. Ninth Ave. Three years ago, he and his business partner, Gabe Genauer, struck out on their own to found their general contracting business utilizing sustainable practices.

"This is the first time I've run into a builder that's coming to us with green building ideas, rather than a consultant pushing it from a design side," said Cassidy Bolger, architect and project manager with Holst Architecture.

"I think what's interesting about it is trying to find the comfortable ground where you can push the envelope of what's typical in construction into something more sustainable," Bolger said.

### Template for the future

Hale expects the addition of green ele-

ments to increase the cost of his project by about 5 to 10 percent, which he hopes to recoup through effective marketing of the building's sustainable status.

The market for sustainable buildings in Portland has grown significantly over the past 10 years, Barrs said. By now Portland has become well-known for its green buildings and sustainable industries.

After three years in business constructing medium-sized commercial buildings, Barrs and Genauer will do about \$4.5 million of work this year.

If all goes well on the project, Hale plans to implement sustainable building practices in the rest of his projects. Hale's residential construction company, Woodhill Homes, builds approximately 100 homes each year in Bend and Redmond.

"We're going to make a big change and a big shift with everything that we do going towards a more responsible home," Hale said. "Carrington opened my eyes like they've never been opened before."