

By Michael Chamernik, Associate Editor

SUSTAINABILITY

SOLAR DECATHLON
PREVIEW

Twelve collegiate teams have spent nearly two years designing and building energy-efficient houses for the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Decathlon 2017, which will be held in Denver during the first two weekends in October.

The teams will go head-to-head in 10 contests that evaluate factors including water use, energy efficiency, design cost-effectiveness, innovation, and market potential.



Among the competitors, Team Netherlands has created a modular home inspired by the circular economy, which requires non-compostable products that can be reused. Our H2Ouse, from the University of California, Davis team, has graywater reuse systems, sanitation technology, and monitoring and feedback systems that could cut the water use of a typical residence by half. The Washington University in St. Louis team designed a home constructed of ultra-high-performance concrete that protects against fire, insects, extreme weather, and moisture and mold.

Designed to withstand tornadoes, a steel “Strong Room” below the subfloor with permanent footings is the highlight of the Surviv(AL) house from the

University of Alabama at Birmingham, and Calhoun Community College. The team from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas created an age-in-place home that has a nostalgic mid-century modern feel with handicapped-accessible features, radiant floor heating, and mini-split heat pumps, as well as wireless integrated heating, cooling, security, and lighting controls. The Washington State University team designed a community of modular energy-smart small-size houses to fill an urban lot that already has access to infrastructure and utilities.

Six of the contests will be subjectively judged—jury members will provide evaluations based on aesthetics, innovation, and design inspiration. The winners of the remaining four contests will be determined by the effectiveness of their task completion and by monitored performance, such as indoor air temperature and electricity use.

For the first time, winning teams will be awarded cash prizes, with the overall winner taking home \$300,000.

TRENDS

PAINT COLORS
AND HOME PRICES

Buyers like a blue bathroom so much that they’re willing to pay more for it.

Based on 32,000 photos from sold homes around the country, Zillow’s 2017 Paint Color Analysis examined how certain paint colors affect a home’s average sales price compared with similar homes that have white walls.

Homes with blue bathrooms, particularly those painted light powder blue or periwinkle, sold at the highest premium: \$5,440 more than average.

But a preference for blue isn’t limited to the bathroom. On average, homes

were sold at a premium of \$1,926 for slate blue to pale gray-blue dining rooms; \$1,856 for light cerulean to cadet blue bedrooms; and \$1,809 for light blue to soft gray-blue kitchens. A home with a navy blue front door could sell for \$1,514 more than expected.

“Painting walls in fresh, natural-looking colors, particularly in shades of blue and pale gray not only make a home feel larger, but also are neutral enough to help future buyers envision themselves living in the space,” Svenja Gudell, Zillow’s chief economist, said in a statement. “Incorporating light blue in kitchens and bathrooms may pay off especially well as the color complements white countertops and cabinets, a growing trend in both rooms.”

Beige and greige also got some love from buyers: Homes with living rooms painted light beige or pale taupe sold for \$1,809 more than expected, and homes with gray-brown exteriors sold at a \$1,526 premium.

The analysis also revealed that buyers don’t care for white bathrooms, which sold for \$4,035 less than expected. Other colors that negatively affected home prices include red and terra-cotta bedrooms (\$2,031 less than expected) and brown home exteriors (\$1,970).

But the embrace of blue hues doesn’t extend to the living room: Light blue and periwinkle living rooms sold for \$820 less than expected.

HOME SALES

VIRTUAL BESTS
IN-PERSON VISITS

Current housing market conditions, along with new technology, are making people more comfortable with buying a home virtually. A recent Redfin survey found that 33 percent of respondents

[MARKET UPDATE]

who bought a house within the last year did so without making an in-person visit, up from 19 percent a year ago. Millennials led the charge. Some

41 percent skipped an in-person visit, compared with 30 percent of Gen Xers and 12 percent of Baby Boomers. The survey used responses from 3,350 U.S.

residents across 11 metro areas.

Buyers aren't skipping visits because of laziness. Rather, they need to act quicker than ever before because of the nation's inventory shortage. The typical home went under contract in just 37 days in May, the shortest time ever recorded and seven days faster than a year ago, according to Redfin data.

Plus, buyers can now get a good sense of their prospective homes via a screen, with real estate agencies beginning to dabble in 3-D photography and virtual reality to create an accurate impression of the look and feel of a home.

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Laundry Room Referrals

HOUSING SALES

INVENTORY AND TIME ON MARKET

During the second quarter, housing inventory dropped 8.9 percent nationally year-over-year, the ninth consecutive quarter with a decline. Buyers are working fast to snag what they can.

Trulia's quarterly Inventory and Price Watch report found a strong link between rates of inventory and the average time that homes spend on the market. Metros with the steepest drop in available homes also have fewer on the market after two months.

Over the past year, the number of available starter and trade-up homes declined by 15.6 and 13.1 percent, respectively, and inventory as a whole is down 20 percent from five years ago.

The squeeze is pushing buyers to put more of their income toward a purchase. Starter-home buyers need to spend 39.1 percent of their income to buy a median-price home, a 3.1 percentage point increase from last year. Trade-up buyers spend 26 percent of income on an average home, 1.7 percentage points more than last year.

Circle 757

[MARKET UPDATE]

Now, buyers are faced with listings that seem to vanish right before their eyes. Since 2012, the share of homes on the market after two months has

dropped 10 points to 47 percent.

The fastest markets are in places such as San Jose and Oakland, Calif., Seattle, and San Francisco, where less

than 25 percent of homes were still on the market after two months in the second quarter. Columbus, Ohio, Denver, Salt Lake City, and San Diego are among the other competitive markets, with less than a third of homes on the market after two months.

"Markets that have witnessed larger decreases in inventory have experienced larger declines in the share of homes still sitting on the market after two months," Trulia's chief economist Ralph McLaughlin said in a statement. "With these declines, falling inventory has also pushed affordability of homes across all segments to new post-recession lows."

LABOR

CONSTRUCTION WORKER AGES

The typical U.S. construction worker is 41, or roughly the same age as the average worker in the overall American workforce. For specifics, NAHB's analysis of the most recent 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) found that the median age of a laborer varies by occupation and by region of the country.

Workers in the Northeast skew older: The median age of a construction worker is 47 in Vermont, 46 in Rhode Island, and 44 in Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, while the median age in Rocky Mountain and Midwest states such as Nebraska, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming is 38 or younger.

Construction and building inspectors are typically the oldest workers, with a median age over 50. Construction managers, electricians, cement masons, and concrete finishers have median ages between 40 and 45, while helpers, roofers, and insulation workers have a median age under 40. **PB**

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