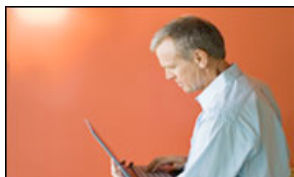




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**Trends in Daylighting**

The sun has been warming and lighting the earth for eons. Now, it's doing the same for homes thanks to glass-intensive designs that maximize natural light.

By Matt Alderton


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Thanks to a popular design trend called "daylighting," builders and architects are saying, "Let there be light."

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, daylighting is defined as, "the use of direct, diffuse or reflected sunlight to provide full or supplemental lighting for building interiors."

Bryan Milling, an account manager at VELUX America, a Greenwood, S.C.-based manufacturer of skylights and roofs agrees and says, "daylight is the essential element that transforms conventional rooms into splendid spaces that add value and quality to our homes and lives."

It's no surprise, then, that a growing number of architects and builders are constructing homes that draw in light. In fact, the average number of windows per home reached 19 in 2004, according to the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB). That's up from approximately 15 in 2000 and close to nine a decade earlier.

For homeowners, all that extra glass means warmer, brighter homes. For homebuilders, meanwhile, it means increased revenue and a chance to capitalize on the daylighting trend.

**The Bright Side**

Of course, daylighting lends homes more than light, according to Pete Baldine, chief development officer for Moran Industries, a Midlothian, Ill.-based franchiser that owns and operates SmartView Window Solutions, which specializes in the installation of window film for residential and commercial applications.

"[Daylighting] has some pretty significant benefits," he says. Among them:

- **Better views:** If you live in an environment where you've got great views, daylighting can help you see and enjoy more of them.
- **A more open environment:** While windows don't actually create more space, they make rooms *appear* larger, giving the illusion of more square footage.
- **Lower energy bills:** Because sunlight can naturally heat the home, more of it means having to rely on your furnace less.
- **Higher home values:** If you're going to sell your home, your buyers will be looking for the newest trends. Daylighting is among them.
- **More smiles:** A proven mood enhancer, natural sunlight improves people's emotions and elicits more smiles.

The benefits are equally compelling for homebuilders as they are for homeowners, according to Milling. "Daylighting certainly creates revenue opportunities as well as marketing opportunities," he says. "Margins on the products, plus the installation revenue, especially in the green building environment, can be substantial for the builder and very beneficial over time for the homeowner."

What's more, that green building environment gives builders who are fluent in daylighting an edge when it comes to marketing to environmentally friendly customers and bidding on eco-conscious projects. "It's a trend that has a lot of traction," Baldine says of green building in general, and daylighting in particular. "It's what people want."

**Windows, Skylights and More**

For builders and homeowners that want to capitalize on the benefits of daylighting, there are several options, including [windows](#), [skylights](#), roof windows and sunrooms.

Of these, the most traditional option is vertical windows, which are more versatile than ever thanks to custom designs and expansive product lines. "Window manufacturers have done a good job of taking stock window designs and creating a situation where they can be integrated with other windows in their line to create larger and more dramatic window spaces," Baldine says.

Another choice, skylights, is becoming even more popular. Choices include fixed skylights, manual or electric venting skylights and tubular skylights, as well as roof windows for bonus rooms and attics.

For even more glass and sunlight, homeowners might look to integrated sunrooms or conservatories, many of which are made almost entirely of glass.

**Broken Glass?**

Despite its many benefits, daylighting does have some potential drawbacks. The cost of installation can be prohibitive, as having more windows means additional spending on both units and labor. Once installed, homeowners incur the cost of outfitting these extra windows with blinds, shades and draperies to provide privacy and control light. These additional costs, Milling says, can even-out with the overall energy savings that daylight provides.

Other possible concerns with daylighting include structural integrity—glass is less durable and less sturdy than other building materials—excess heat absorption in warm months and exposure to UV rays, which can damage [drapes](#), carpets and upholstery.

"Architects and manufacturers have largely solved glass' structural issues related to using more glass in construction for the most part, allowing them to accomplish more from a daylighting perspective," Baldine says. "The disadvantages of daylighting such as upholstery fading, heat in the summer months and damage to hardwood floors, could be minimized if builders used more expensive coated glass for windows and skylights."

[ENERGY STAR-qualified windows](#), or windows with double-pane construction, are also reliable, according to Milling, and are among the most energy-efficient windows available.

A final and less costly option, Baldine points out, is [window film](#), which offers a more affordable solution to solving the problem of blocking UV rays and accomplishing heat rejection benefits.

With the right products and proper installation, windows and skylights can minimize the negative aspects of daylighting while maximizing the positive ones, not the least of which is happier, more satisfied customers.

"It's simple," Baldine concludes. "People are in a better mood when the sun is shining."

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