Greenbuild 2012 Tours: A Taste of Bay Area Green

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Cavallo Point, one of the Greenbuild half-day tours on Friday, Nov. 16 (Credit: Kodiak Greenwood)

From redwood trees to adaptive reuse, San Francisco is chock full of incredible sights – green buildings and beyond. At USGBC's annual Greenbuild International Conference and Expo, located in San Francisco this year, you can sample from two dozen tours of buildings (and much more), specially curated by San Fran insiders.

Every year, the Greenbuild "host committee," made of volunteers from USGBC's regional chapters, organizes a series of tours to help visitors learn more about the community and the buildings and the culture of the host locale. This year's lineup is really impressive. The tour committee, led by Lindsay Baker (Green Team Consultant at Mary Davidge Associates) and Mark Palmer (Green Building Coordinator at City and County of San Francisco), has hand-picked 12 half-day tours on Friday and Saturday, plus 12 full-day tours on Saturday.

How did they do it? The criteria for setting up the tours included a focus on educational content, the operational issues, showcasing the Bay Area, showing off unique approaches to green building issues, and making sure that the tours would be fun and interactive. The 25-person committee received a whopping 170 submissions and then scored and grouped them.

"We've worked hard to make sure that there are tours that will appeal to all levels—newbies and those who want to 'dork out' about numbers and performance with engineers," says Baker. "We also wanted to be sure that there would be tours that would appeal to a variety of sectors."

Mark Palmer notes that it was also important to think about buildings that are not usually available for public visitation, because those would appeal to locals as well as those coming from elsewhere.

What are their faves? That's not a fair question, but there are a couple of shout-outs:

Baker: "I'm psyched about the Green Historic Office Preservation tour. It's a fantastic group of buildings—renovated structures in San Francisco and Oakland. To me, adaptive reuse is a really important area, so I think this is important. It may not be as glamorous as the wineries, but I think there are a great many lessons to be learned from those spaces."

Palmer: "The 'Walk in the Woods' tour, exploring the redwoods in Santa Cruz! Who doesn't want to take this tour? It's not a building, but it's an important part of our place, to be sure. Another one that comes to mind is the "Life North of the Golden Gate" tour, which includes two residential properties that would not normally be something you could see, plus Marin Country Day School. It's a fun mix."

As Baker points out, it's a bit of embarrassment of riches. "Because the area is so full of fantastic examples of sustainable design, we were able to handpick some remarkable destinations: not just tours of buildings that are solid green examples (though we have those, too). We tried to curate and cultivate a real mix here. We're lucky to be able to do this here in this community."

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