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BUILDER's 10 Favorite Houses of 2011

Many are beautiful, a lot are clever and innovative, and some are just plain cool.

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Here at *Builder*, there's nothing we love more than a beautiful house—except a beautiful house that functions well, runs efficiently, and is perfectly suited for the needs of its residents. And that's exactly what these homes are. With beauty, brains, and a bit of the unexpected, they took our breath away while offering plenty of great ideas destined to win consumers over for years to come.

Favorite Passive House



Credit: Elliott Kaufman

Snug and warm inside despite the snow piled around it, a floor-to-truss glass front, and a lack of conventional mechanical HVAC systems, who wouldn't love [this house](#)? With its gothic arch-vaulted ceiling and glass front, it looks more like a church nestled in the woods of upstate New York than a home with all the properties of a 1,650-square-foot Igloo cooler with a view. Architect Dennis Wedlick and custom builder Bill Stratton abandoned LEED and other similar U.S. guidelines for energy efficiency and sustainability and built the house to the stringent standards subscribed by the

Passive House Institute of Germany. Rather than relying on solar panels and other mechanical means to generate energy, the house itself and how it is sited is what makes it efficient. The structure is super insulated, and it's positioned and designed to be shady in the summer and sunny in the winter.

Favorite Traditional House



As crisp as the crunch of an apple from the old-growth orchard in its front yard, [this New England home](#)'s exterior looks like it was newly minted in 1711. Down to its pediments, pilasters, dentils, and 12-over-12 double-hung windows, the home's exterior is a copy of the Wells Thom House in Deerfield, Mass., which was built in that year. That home's symmetrical façade is considered one of the finest examples of classical Georgian-style architecture. While the styling is old school, some of the construction materials and methods are new age. The house was built for less than \$200 a foot by using prefab rafters, floors, wall systems and even trims. Its skin, however, is hemlock clapboard and cedar roofing, not composites.

Favorite Exotic Locale House



After acknowledging that even a grass hut might live well in Hawaii, you have to give the designers and builders of [this Assembly House](#) credit for taking full advantage of a climate where you can wander around in sarongs or board shorts all year long. This is a house where walls are used for privacy only. The rest

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Assembly House, Kona, Hawaii

Credit: Matthew Millman

of the time, you can meander from open public areas to more intimate private spaces through patches of tropical gardens. This 18,000-square-foot custom home in Kona is more of a village of structures set in a garden than one large building. The inspiration was Hawaiian vernacular open public pavilions. Zak Architecture designed movable panels to permit

breezes, views, and light inside. Even the interior bathroom structures open to outside shower gardens.

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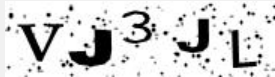
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Boyce Thompson: Boyce On Building

Boyce Thompson is editorial director of the BUILDER group of magazines published by Hanley Wood. Drawing on his years of experience covering home building, architecture, and retailing, Boyce tackles diverse and far-ranging industry topics in his twice-weekly blog.

“A marketing consultant whispered in my ear several years ago that the next time I visited Salt Lake City, I should see a master plan community called Daybreak. Though we have covered the project since its inception in 2004—it's located on land owned by Kennecott Utah Copper—I finally got a chance to see it live and in person this summer. It really is a sight to behold.”



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