

## Bazzani Associates

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### Think Local First, Western Michigan

In 1981 Guy Bazzani founded his construction and development firm, [Bazzani Associates](#). Today he is the sole owner of an architecture, construction, and real estate firm with \$4 million in annual revenues.

Guy was committed to a triple bottom line—people, planet, and profits—long before this term was in vogue. Guy and Bazzani Associates use their years of experience and technical ingenuity to partner with the natural environment to help build strong and inviting communities. They effectively leverage natural resources such as sunlight, rain, and soil in a cooperative manner to create systems that ultimately cost their clients less and provide greater value.

An entrepreneur who lives his grand vision every day, Guy believes in the importance of green building and the power of positive economic and community development. He can't do one without the other. Because he's been a designer-builder and developer in Grand Rapids for twenty-five years, you can see the results of his work by walking the streets of this racially diverse urban area.

The construction of his current office is a great example of how Guy and his company do their work. When Guy purchased the historic brick buildings built in 1918, they had been abandoned and were being used by drug dealers. The neighborhood needed revitalization and had been redlined by banks as an area that was not to receive loans. Guy saw the potential for the buildings and the neighborhood. He then began to work with neighborhood residents and city officials to design a plan that was historically appropriate and supported the livability and growth of the community. In large part because of his transparency and willingness to listen and because he did what he promised, his new buildings received accolades from all racial groups in the community.

The rebuilt 30,000-square-foot group of mixed-use historic buildings covers a whole block and anchors a corner in the neighborhood and has kept its classic character and 1920s feel. It's now much more open and inviting and currently houses the offices of Bazzani Associates, Guy's personal home, and a collection of office and retail uses that have brought new economic life to this previously deteriorated neighborhood.

The structure is a state-of-the-art "green building" that was the first building in Grand Rapids to achieve a silver-level Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, a national standard for environmentally responsible building. This certification is extremely detailed in its requirements, and achieving it is no small feat.

Bazzani Associates installed dual flush toilets that use only 0.8 gallon per flush (compared to 1.6 gallons for low-flush toilets and 3 gallons for standard ones). The building was constructed with sustainable and nontoxic materials, and most of the construction waste was recycled. Although finishing products such as glues and paints have been improved in recent years, the fumes they give off remain a challenge. Bazzani used products that give off a minimum of gases, such as prefinished bamboo. Once the building was complete, fresh air was pumped in for two weeks to flush out the building. All of this work created an elegant, healthy, and functional building that could be heated for \$.58 per square foot (2004) at a time when the average cost to heat a building in Grand Rapids was \$2.00 per square foot.

Guy and his team soon found their next project in the neighborhood. By collaborating with neighborhood groups and local foundations, Bazzani Associates purchased a brownfield site located at a critical corner in the adjoining East Hills neighborhood.

The process of remediating this site was complicated and involved removing contaminated material up to 25 feet deep. It ultimately cost the previous owner (an oil company) more than \$550,000. The result is what is known today as the East Hills Center—a five-unit retail condominium that meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for New Buildings in Historic Districts. Guy and his team designed a context-sensitive building that achieved a LEED gold certification. They superinsulated the building and designed it for maximum passive solar heat.

Utilizing daylight-harvesting technology, they connected light sensors with automatic dimmers to maximize natural light and minimize artificial light. The building incorporates the same water conservation methods and material selection as the Bazzani Associates building.

Stormwater management is becoming a major issue in construction projects. Unless captured, the water that runs off a site flows into the streets, where it becomes contaminated with brake and tire dust. If it flows into a river, that river is toxic to all life.

The East Hills Center is a half-acre site designed to have zero stormwater discharge and is not connected to the city stormwater system. All rainwater either evaporates or recharges the groundwater. The building has a green roof covered with a drought-resistant succulent that absorbs water and holds it. In the summer, the water evaporation cools the building. Stormwater from the parking lot drains into a garden of plants and a biomass that filters the contaminants coming off the lot.

All of this good, green building was done in a manner sensitive to the character of this historic district. In fact, Guy went so far as to put a deed restriction on the property mandating that any architectural changes must be approved by the local neighborhood association. For Guy Bazzani and his company, partnering with the environment to improve the community is just part of doing business—it's what they're all about.

*From Growing Local Value, by Laury Hammel and Gun Denhart, Berrett-Koehler, 2007.*