Hey everyone, welcome back. I'm Ronan, and this is your weekly look at what's changing in housing, sustainability, and the future of the built environment. This week:

As America searches for more housing, one of the biggest opportunities may already be standing. The EPA says renovating and reusing existing buildings is often more sustainable than tearing them down because it preserves the carbon already invested in the structure. In fact, one analysis found it can take about 65 years for an energy-efficient new building to offset the carbon released by demolition and replacement. That makes adding usable square footage for a growing family, creating multigenerational living space, or building an ADU more than affordability solutions—they're climate solutions, too. And now a new generation of digital tools is making those projects easier. Newly released Underbuilt Radar instantly analyzes zoning, setbacks, height limits, and buildable area so homeowners can see what's possible before spending thousands on plans. Other free tools, like Architecture 2030's CARE Tool, compare the carbon impact of renovating versus rebuilding, while RMI's Green Upgrade Calculator estimates the costs, energy savings, and emissions reductions of upgrades like heat pumps, insulation, solar, and batteries. We'll put links to all of them in the show notes, because sometimes the most sustainable new home isn't built on a new lot—it's the one you already own.

- Architecture 2030 CARE Tool (Compare renovation vs. demolition carbon impacts)
  https://www.architecture2030.org/caretool/
- RMI Green Upgrade Calculator (Estimate costs, energy savings, and carbon reductions from home upgrades)
  https://rmi.org/resources/a-newer-and-more-powerful-green-upgrade-calculator/
- Underbuilt Radar by Breezy (Analyze zoning, setbacks, buildable area, and development potential)
  https://underbuilt.com/
- Breezy (Platform for agents and homeowners)
  https://www.breezy.com/
- ADU Accelerator (Resources for planning and financing accessory dwelling units)
  https://aduaccelerator.org/
- ENERGY STAR Home Upgrade (Federal guidance on the best sequence for energy-efficient home improvements)
  https://www.energystar.gov/saveathome
- DOE Home Energy Saver (U.S. Department of Energy tool for evaluating home energy improvements)
  https://hes.lbl.gov/

Is Housing Transparency Becoming an Affordability Issue? A growing debate over private home sales raises an important question: What happens when more homes sell behind closed doors instead of on the open market? The concern isn't just transparency. It's what some are calling "valuation drift." Private sales influence future listing prices, appraisals, tax assessments, and ultimately what the next buyer pays. For workforce buyers, retirees looking to downsize, and families already stretching to afford a home, this can make housing even less attainable. We need to make sure everyone has a fair chance to compete—and that homes are selling in a market everyone can see.

https://www.inman.com/2026/08/10/why-housing-transparency-matters-beyond-the-luxury-market/?

A recent article from Go Green Fine Interiors highlights several emerging design trends for 2027 that reflect the growing demand for healthier, more sustainable homes. The 5 we found most notable are, one, Neuroarchitecture, or Homes designed to support the nervous system through natural light, thoughtful proportions, acoustics, and views to nature, which helps to reduce stress and improve well-being. Number 2 is Circadian Lighting, which are systems that shift throughout the day to better match the body's natural rhythms, supporting sleep, focus, and overall wellness. Number 3 is Healthier Materials. Designers are increasingly selecting finishes, furnishings, and textiles based on what they emit into indoor air, prioritizing low-toxicity materials and healthier indoor environments. Number 4, rightsizing. Think smaller, more intentional homes that reduce material use, energy cnsumption, and maintenance while better reflecting how people actually live. And, 5, Regenerative Material Selection: this means looking beyond "green" labels to evaluate a material's full life cycle—from sourcing and durability to end-of-life impact.

You can read the full piece at Go Green Fine Interiors

https://www.gogreenfineinteriors.com/blog/10-interior-design-trends-just-starting-to-take-hold-for-late-2026-and-2027

Here's a statistic that says a lot about where homebuilding is headed: One in three new single-family homes built in America now receives an independent energy performance rating. According to RESNET, more than 420,000 homes earned a HERS Rating in 2025—about 34% of all new homes built—and the average rated home is now 47% more energy efficient than a home built to 2006 standards. Water performance is improving too, with HERS H 2 Oh ratings up 25% last year. The takeaway? Builders aren't just claiming better performance anymore—they're proving it.

https://www.resnet.us/articles/the-2026-trends-in-hers-rated-homes-report/

Artificial intelligence may live in the cloud, but the cloud runs on land, electricity, and increasingly, its own power plants. Researchers have identified what they call "zombie power plants"—aging coal and natural gas plants that were supposed to retire but are staying alive to meet AI data center demand. These 15 delayed retirements alone emit more climate pollution each year than the entire state of Massachusetts. But that's just the beginning. A new New York Times investigation reports that AI companies aren't waiting for the electric grid anymore—they're building their own power plants. At least 82 natural gas plants have been proposed or are already under construction to power data centers, with some projects approved in just days. And many facilities still rely on diesel generators for backup power, which researchers say can emit 200 to 600 times more nitrogen oxides than a natural gas plant, contributing to asthma, heart disease, and an estimated $20 billion a year in public health costs by 2028. The encouraging news? Renewable microgrids and battery storage offer a cleaner path forward—one that could power AI without reviving yesterday's energy systems.

https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/05/climate/data-centers-pollution-trump-ai-energy.html

https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2026/06/how-bad-is-ai-for-the-environment/

https://www.eesi.org/articles/view/data-centers-are-hotbeds-of-health-risks

Buckle up. Scientists warn the El Niño expected this fall and winter could be one of the strongest on record, bringing greater risks of extreme heat, flooding, drought, wildfires, and severe storms. At the same time, climate scientists say global warming is "lifting the flammability veil," exposing regions that rarely experienced major wildfires to conditions that now support large, destructive fires. That's why we're seeing devastating fires not only in California, but in Washington, Canada, Greece, France, and Spain. For builders, wildfire resilience is becoming less about geography and more about good building science. And the threat doesn't end when the flames do. Fine particulate smoke can travel hundreds of miles, degrading indoor air quality far from an active wildfire. That's why ASHRAE is highlighting Guideline 44 for wildfire smoke protection through better filtration, ventilation, and air cleaning, along with Standard 188 and Guideline 12 to reduce Legionella risk in building water systems. Six years ago, Green Builder Media CEO Sara Gutterman warned we had about a decade to avoid what scientists call the Pyrocene—the Age of Fire. This week, she argues it's no longer a prediction. It's our reality. But she also points to reasons for optimism. Clean energy, battery storage, and fire-resilient building technologies are advancing faster than ever. Read her new article, *The Age of Fire, Revisited*, for why she believes the future isn't written yet.

https://prospect.org/2026/07/28/climate-change-wildfires-smoke-el-nino-renewable-energy-trump/?

https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/the-age-of-fire-revisited

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-08-04/the-us-is-having-one-of-its-worst-wildfire-season-in-years?

https://store.accuristech.com/ashrae/standards/ashrae-188-2021?product_id=2229689#full

A few weeks ago we told you about YIGBY—"Yes In God's Backyard"—the idea of building housing on church property. Well, now there's a new acronym to add to your bookshelf: YILBY—"Yes In the Library's Backyard." San Diego is studying whether affordable housing could be added to seven city library sites, with library services remaining while housing is integrated into the properties. It's another reminder that solving the housing shortage may not always require finding new land—it may mean taking a fresh look at the land we already own. So here's our question for you: If churches and libraries can help address the housing shortage, who else has underused property? Schools? Shopping malls? Office parks? Golf courses? We'd love to hear your ideas. After all, maybe it's time to start checking out new places to build homes.

https://www.axios.com/local/san-diego/2026/08/11/san-diego-affordable-housing-public-land-library-redevelopment

Our Editors' Product of the Week is "High-Max" Solid Surface by "L X Houses" Builders looking for a surface that balances durability with healthier indoor environments should take a look at HIMACS Solid Surface. Manufactured in the U.S., HIMACS is designed for long-lasting performance while supporting better indoor air quality with no added formaldehyde and low-to-no VOC emissions. Select colors—including the Terrazzo Collection—also carry SCS Recycled Content Certification, with up to 25% recycled material.
https://www.lxhausys.com/us/products/himacs-solid-surface

Here's something for your end-of-summer reading list. Check out the new book, *Homes for Our Time: Sustainable Living,* By Philip Jodidio. It is an inspiring look at how architects around the world are reimagining the single-family home for a changing climate. Featuring 63 projects, the book highlights practical strategies—from living roofs and rainwater harvesting to passive ventilation, thermal mass, locally sourced materials,

and wildfire-resilient design—that prove sustainability can be both beautiful and functional. Rather than focusing on futuristic technology alone, Jodidio shows that some of the most effective solutions are rooted in timeless design principles adapted for today's environmental challenges. This visually stunning book is both a source of inspiration and a glimpse into the future of residential design.

https://bookshop.org/p/books/homes-for-our-time-sustainable-living-philip-jodidio/f7d147d7983f3433?

That’s our news and trend report for the week. Thanks for watching! Please subscribe and share and I’ll see you next Wednesday.