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### Showcase: Metal Buildings

- Part 1: [Sustainability, Flexibility Help Metal Buildings Grow In Popularity](#)
- Part 2: [Metal Buildings Can Be Attractive As Well As Sustainable](#)
- Part 3: [Showcase: Metal Buildings Products](#)

## Metal Buildings Can Be Attractive As Well As Sustainable

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By David Lewellen - March 2013 - [Design & Construction](#)

Manufacturers still produce agricultural buildings and machine shops, but no metal building needs to have an outdated, predictable exterior; metal buildings can be attractive as well as sustainable. Today, when the construction is being used for offices, retail, health care, and other uses, "it can look like anything you want it to," Praeger says. Sometimes the first generation of prefabricated steel-frame buildings from the 1950s were thought of as temporary, but now they are "as permanent as any other type."

**MBMA** members manufacture cold-formed steel frames, a technique generally used for two- or three-story buildings. The retail, education and health care sectors are the biggest end users, Praeger says. For taller buildings, conventional beam-and-deck construction remains the preferred solution.

Craig Laurie, an architect at RBB in California, works almost exclusively in metal, due in part to strict seismic codes in his state. "It's pretty much metal from top to bottom," he says. During his 17-year career, as the seismic code has gotten stricter, with more diagonal bracing, metal has become more and more the default setting for his clients, who are mostly in the health-care field.

Hospitals, he says, are "presenting themselves as sophisticated buildings with sophisticated equipment," so the look is important, and his clients will choose exteriors that incorporate glass, masonry, or metal paneling. "If you see metal and glass, you expect that the rest of it is steel frame," he says.

Emphasis on sustainability and environmentally responsible practices will only continue to grow, and steel frames are very well suited to meet those concerns. If and when a metal building reaches the end of its life, recycling is practical and easy: Workers can unbolt the beams and take them to a scrap yard. Praeger says that his members have built buildings that earned platinum and gold LEED certifications. And the original material, of course, likely also has a high recycled content. "Steel is the most recycled material known to man," Praeger says.

Carmean adds that metal-frame buildings often use standing-seam metal roofs, which are "the longest-lasting roofing solution there is." With proper maintenance, he says, life spans of 40 to 50 years and beyond are not uncommon, and "with today's coatings and finishes,

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system. But the building needs to be designed as a whole; a collection of random metal-framed parts will not offer the same benefits. Praeger says that the MBMA is currently working with Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee to develop zero-emissions buildings.

In 2008, the International Accreditation Society and the MBMA together produced criteria for inspecting construction of metal buildings. The standard, AC472, covers all requirements of the International Building Code for metal building manufacturers, including design, fabrication, and quality management.

Although the metal sector generally follows the industry as a whole, Praeger says that his members gained market share during the recent recession, due to cost-conscious spending by government at all levels, including the military. Today, he said, the private-sector portion of the pie is expanding, and total shipments in 2012 were up 7 percent over the previous year.

*David Lewellen is a freelance writer based in Glendale, Wis.*

**For more information on the International Accreditation Society and its AC472 standard for metal buildings, visit:**

<http://www.mbma.com/display.cfm?p=6>

**For a list of AC472-certified manufacturers, visit:**

[http://www.iasonline.org/Metal\\_Building\\_Systems/MB.html](http://www.iasonline.org/Metal_Building_Systems/MB.html)

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