



HOUSE & HOME

Movin' On Up

Condos Get a Green Makeover

By HAL BROWN.....

Green condominium projects may be the most environmentally responsible housing on the market today. By their nature, condominiums are dense developments that take up less room and help preserve open space. Primarily urban, green condos are often sited near mass transportation routes and bike trails. And they use fewer resources per unit of construction to build and operate.

“Estimates in the industry are that the market is expected to grow three to five times over the next three years,” says Leanne Tobias, a principal in Malachite LLC, a Maryland-based green real estate consulting firm. “It’s now about two percent of commercial construction and five percent of all construction. It’s a substantial market niche, and it’s doing well.”

Like other condominiums, though, green condos aren’t cheap. “I think green condos are probably tracking what’s happening generally in construction,” says Gail Vittori, chair-elect of the U.S. Green Building Council (USBC), which produced the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. “Projects are embracing green [to] be more responsive to what the buying public is looking for. They also want to have the built environment become much more in line with environmental and health considerations.”

Over-the-top cost increases are not a given, however. Tobias says, “If you are doing a moderately green building, the premium to build is typically in the 1.5 to two percent range. It’s very small.” In addition, adds Vittori, the carrying

GREEN LIVING

costs for green units are lighter, since the buildings operate on less energy and water and generate less waste than conventional high-rises. “All of those will be savings every month for the homeowners or residents of those buildings,” she says. “That’s a big plus.”

Hush-Hush

Many condo developers aren’t stressing the green aspects, even if they’re certified projects. “Most people don’t know what LEED means,” said Steven Sheldon, an architect and partner in IBIS Builds in Sebastopol, California. “They’re mostly concerned with whether they really like the place.”

Sheldon’s firm recently completed Florence Lofts—12 townhouses and a 4,200 square foot commercial building in downtown Sebastopol. The project carries ultra-efficient LEED gold certification. It features a 35kW photovoltaic solar system on the roof that is designed to handle electrical needs and a commercial scale graywater system to divert sink and shower water to irrigation purposes. It has permeable paving

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Florence Lofts in Sebastopol, California, features extensive energy-saving features.

nearly three million for a four-bedroom condo. The 32-story, 264-unit building exceeds LEED gold standards with geothermal heating and cooling, twice-filtered air, nontoxic paint, an extensive green roof, landscaped gardens, a lap pool and yoga studio. It's the new home of eco-celebrity actor Leonardo DiCaprio.

Keeping Costs Down

Yet there are signs that more affordable green condo projects are underway nationwide, such as the much-publicized 1400 Fifth Avenue in Harlem, touted as New York's first green condominium, where two-thirds of the units are considered affordable, priced at \$50,000 to \$104,000 and restricted to families of moderate income. Also in the New York metropolitan area,

Habitat for Humanity of Westchester recently announced it has assembled a green design team to build "real affordable condos" in New Rochelle and Westchester.

Costs for green building, says Sheldon, "Depend on how far you take it." But the construction industry, he says, has no choice but to orient in a green direction. "Fifty percent of all the energy used on the planet is used by building," he says. "Forty percent of all the CO2 emissions are related to the building industry, either buildings or companies that manufacture products for buildings. Building probably has more of a potential for polluting the globe than any other single factor—more than automobiles, more than all that stuff. It's a big thing."

CONTACTS: Florence Lofts, www.ibisbuilds.com/florence/florence.html; Riverhouse, <http://theriverhouse.com>; 1400 Fifth Avenue, www.1400on5th.com; Habitat for Humanity, www.habitat.org; U.S. Green Building Council, www.usgbc.org. **E**

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to allow water to seep back into the ground and a bio-remediation tank for excess stormwater.

"It's in downtown Sebastopol and within walking distance of the amenities of the town," Sheldon says. "That's one of the things that make it a sustainable project. People can drive less." The townhouses are in the \$700,000 range.

In other cities, costs go up significantly. A condo at the eco-luxury Riverhouse overlooking the Hudson River in New York City's Battery Park City ranges from over \$800,000 for a one-bedroom unit to

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