

GREEN REPORT



TYLER ANDERSON / NATIONAL POST

Builder Mazyar Mortazavi traded in his SUV for a hybrid, and is bringing the green option to his construction projects as well, to meet consumer demand.

HOME BUILDERS GO GREEN

NATIONWIDE WAVE

'You have to live it, breath it, walk the talk'

BY PAUL BARKER

Mazar Mortazavi, principal of TAS DesignBuild, an award-winning Toronto developer of condominiums and town homes, is so committed to the green movement he has traded in his beloved Range Rover for a hybrid vehicle.

"As a builder, you have to live it, you have to breath it and you have to walk the talk," he says. "Consumer demand is forcing the housing market to change. Traditionally, developers have not been innovators in the housing market. Now, for the first time, there is this shift where they are trying to understand what is going on and introduce change before the consumer asks for it."

"This is going to be the century's major socio-cultural shift," he predicts. "It is a mindset change and the implications go far and wide."

The green home groundswell is soaring as builders, suppliers, bankers and buyers sign on with a growing environmental sustainability movement that is gathering momentum across the country.

In Halifax, Integrity Homes now posts the yearly tonnage of greenhouse gases its homes are saving on its Web site. The company estimates that the average traditional new home releases 14.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide from the burning of oil, natural gas and other fossil fuels, while its green homes reduce emissions by more than 30% by using building products from recycled materials.

In Ottawa, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. recently held a meeting with members of the home-building industry to discuss the creation of a sustainable roadmap that would contain helpful hints for builders on how best to construct a green home.

In Toronto, Monarch Corp., a division of the Taylor Wimpey, the world's largest homebuilder, and the Toronto Economic Development Corp. announced last month they would jointly develop the largest low-rise green residential community in Canada. Encompassing a mix of 196 town homes and single-family homes, the two say the goal of the project is to show it can be economically viable and used as a model in the greening of home building.

And in Edmonton, builders now receive rebates from the city for homes built to bronze, silver and gold Built Green standards, a voluntary green program that operates in Alberta and British Columbia.

Built Green is one of several

regional programs across the country that use the EnerGuide Rating Scale, a rating service developed by Natural Resources Canada used to determine a home's level of energy efficiency. According to the federal government department, a new home built to the building code currently contains an average EnerGuide rating of 68. However, homes built using standards contained in energy efficiency initiatives have a rating between 72 and 82.

The most stringent of these is the R-2000 Home Program,

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introduced in 1982. Homes designed around it must use environmentally friendly and renewable products and each must be inspected, tested and certified before a seal of approval is issued. In addition, a minimum EnerGuide rating of 80 must be recorded.

R-2000 rules in Newfoundland and Labrador, Atlantic Canada, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, while Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia have their own regional energy efficiency programs, with each

being equally as stringent in terms of the EnerGuide rating.

Alberta and British Columbia have the R-2000 program along with the less stringent Built Green regional initiative, which carries a lower minimum EnerGuide rating of 77, as does Manitoba with its Power Smart New Homes program.

Andy Goyda, marketing development manager with Owens Corning Canada, a founding sponsor of Built Green and Ontario's Energy Star, says one program does not suit the whole country.

"R-2000 is very technically sound but we are finding it that there are many regional differences across Canada. Each province needs their own sustainability program."

The other debate is whether all of these initiatives should be mandatory or voluntary. Grant Ainsley, executive officer of Canadian Home Builders Association-Alberta, prefers the latter.

"There are calls around the country for a mandated solution but we are finding that Built Green on a voluntary basis is working well," he says. "It allows both the builder and the consumer to make energy-efficient choices."

That will not be the case in Ontario and Nova Scotia.

With the release of the 2006 Ontario Building Code in June, builders of new homes were given notice that by 2012, they will face the toughest energy-

efficiency standards in Canada.

A typical new house built this year will be 21% more energy efficient than one built under the former code, and by 2012, new houses built under permits applied for that year will need to meet the tough EnerGuide 80 rating.

Meanwhile, all new homes in Nova Scotia will need an energy rating of 80 by 2011, as a result of an initiative announced in January by Bill Dooks, the provincial minister responsible for Conserve Nova Scotia. Paul Pettipas, CEO of the Nova Scotia Home Builders Association, says mandatory legislation is inevitable.

"Some building associations are chafing under that but luckily, my board of directors have voted in favour of EnerGuide 80 by 2011," he says.

"The biggest challenge we have is to convince the general public that green, in the end, pays for itself," he says. "When we do things that pollute this world, someone has to clean it up. As an association, we are suggesting to our members that they do it voluntarily but if a regulation comes in that makes sense, let's work with the government and support it."

"[Gone are] the days of sticking your head in the sand and saying, 'these storms and ice cap meltings are a coincidence.' I don't buy it. I was a R-2000 builder when I joined this association. I believe in it."

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