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## It's easy to build green

By **Ryan Szporer, The Suburban**

An increasing number of homeowners are concerned about the environment and want their homes to be as energy efficient as possible. As a result, Montreal has seen the construction of more and more environmentally friendly houses.

Green homes, characterized primarily by their water and energy-saving features, are multiplying in numbers and are in the process of evolving with the advent of net-zero-energy housing — homes that use up as much energy as they generate.

One such home, a triplex, is currently being built in Verdun and will be ready for occupancy early next year, and an 18-unit complex on the same site is already underway and will be put on the market in the next few months. Both are developed by the same company, EcoCité Developments.

"Net-zero-energy takes it one step further by incorporating a few additional energy systems so that it produces more energy than the buildings we normally develop," says Cheryl Gladu of EcoCité.

As part of an even larger design team, Abondance Montreal, Gladu and EcoCité won a sustainable development competition in February, sponsored by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, allowing them to go ahead with the project.

"We've used geothermal [technology] in the past in a few of our projects. This is a technology that takes energy from the earth to provide heating and cooling for the buildings," says Gladu, 30. "But this will be the first time that we use photovoltaic [PV solar panels] and solar thermal [vacuum tubes] in order to generate electricity... and to produce hot water for the building. It's a more energy-productive building than we've done in the past."

EcoCité founder Christopher Sweetnam-Holmes, 32, completed his first green project in 2004, a property in Point St. Charles near Atwater Market, named Habitat 1. Sweetnam-Holmes says that first project and the several projects he's worked on since, led to the one in Verdun.

"I had lots of challenges in terms of learning what worked and what didn't work. Each building is like a laboratory and I learn from it," he says.

One of the eight condos in the original Habitat 1 is currently up for sale and its owner, Vytas Gruodis, 40, says it isn't because he's grown tired of his former "bachelor pad."

"My wife and I lived there for quite some time — two years — after it was completed. So, we were very comfortable living there," says Gruodis, adding that the move was prompted by the advent of the couple's first child. "It's a two-storey, open-plan loft. I mean, there's no baby room, you know."

Gruodis initially bought the condo because he liked the concept and thought it was "a very forward-thinking way of building residential real estate."

He compliments the condo as being easy to maintain and says it's due in large part to the condo's green features which include regular filtered-air exchanges and a design that promotes optimal absorption of sun rays during winter to keep the home warm.

Going green can also be very affordable, according to Sweetnam-Holmes. "I think, sometimes, it requires people to think more long term," he says.

"Most of the studies show that [a green home] ends up being two to five percent more [expensive] to build. Even if you spend two to five percent more on your green features, you can easily absorb that in some other parts of the building."

Today, the future of greener homes looks brighter than ever. Sweetnam-Holmes believes a lack of awareness and education was the main obstacle holding the movement back, but says there are signs that homeowners are starting to come around.

Gladu, his business partner, is also optimistic. "[The year] 2030 is our goal to get it to be a more standard form of construction," she says. "But, in the meantime, hopefully we'll see buildings with better envelopes [insulation], more energy-efficient construction in general, more healthy-material selection, and more energy systems on the buildings... I see this happening more and more."

2007-09-19 11:41:34



**Environmentally friendly green homes are multiplying in numbers**



**Habitat 1 in Point St. Charles was completed in 2004.**

By **The Suburban.com**