

My Unusual Path to Green

By Marvin Alexander



I have been selling real estate in numerous capacities (commercial, residential resale and residential new homes) for over 16 years, and until recently, I was not really that progressive on the issue of the environment, despite selling green homes for clients.

In 2005, I was approached by my largest client, Menkes Developments, because they were going to build an entire subdivision to the Energy Star for New Homes specifications, well prior to this being commonplace as it is today. So, my team and I attended meetings and received training on how to sell Energy Star. We were doing what our client wanted, but I was still concerned, even skeptical, that we could not sell buyers on the value proposition of purchasing an Energy Star home at an additional cost.

I sat through the pitches about the increased quality, comfort, financial savings and environmental benefits, but I must confess, I left these meetings feeling pessimistic. As I look back, I still remember that awful feeling in the pit of my stomach on the opening day as I realized that the onus was on us to educate buyers, and sell this new Energy Star upgrade.

We did phenomenally well, selling over half of the subdivision in the opening weekend! Customers really got it, and so did other builders. Yet, I was not really convinced; perhaps it was the location, price point or the designs, but I was convinced something else drove those sales.

Not long after, I was approached by another client of mine, Rodeo Fine Homes, with an even more audacious proposition. Rodeo Fine Homes had taken on the challenge posed by the town of Newmarket to build an entire subdivision to be 60% beyond code, and they wanted my sales team to oversee the sales.

The first team meeting that included green believers like John Godden and



LEED eco house

Lenard Hart was hours long. I remember driving home alone in my eight-passenger SUV thinking, this Godden guy is crazy; there is no way that we can achieve all of the requirements necessary to produce these houses and still sell them at an acceptable price to the public.

I called the owners of Rodeo Fine Homes on my way back to my office and raised a whole array of concerns as to why this project will never work. Several more conversations ensued in the following weeks. Rodeo Fine Homes then contacted me once more to say that instead of just building LEED-rated homes, they were now going to build the entire site to LEED Platinum specifications, the highest LEED rating. This would be a first in Canada, as never before had a subdivision been built entirely to LEED Platinum levels. I was beside myself, but I went along.

Then, several months later, after many meetings and discussions, I just got it! It wasn't anything in particular that anyone had said or done, it was just a culmination of exposure to a group of progressive

thinkers sincerely looking to produce a better-quality product for a better way of life — how perfect is that?

As opening day approached, my sales team took more training on the LEED product. The launch was unconventional, as was the marketing. But, I am pleased to report that Rodeo Fine Homes sold 14 of the 34 homes at the grand opening, and showed me that traditional buyers were able to see the benefits in the LEED purchase, and green buyers were able to get a product that they had been anxiously anticipating for a long time.

It seems that not all of us involved in green building get there by the same route, and some of us even get there by fighting against it. But for me, the benefits have not only been business changing, but also lifestyle changing.

I am recycling and conserving energy with the utmost awareness, and I recently purchased a fuel-efficient Nissan Versa!

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