

Buildings designed in cool shades of 'green'

Lower costs, higher demand produce eco-friendly projects across the USA

By John Ritter
USA TODAY

PORTLAND, Ore.

Step inside a new condominium at The Henry, an upscale residential tower in the chic heart of this city's flourishing downtown.

See the doors and kitchen cabinets made of pressed straw. Notice no new-building smell from paint, glue and carpet. Puzzle at the funny toilets with two flush buttons. Be aware that incandescent lights are nowhere to be found. Stroll down the hall to the handy recycling bins. Turn on tap water heated by exhaust from clothes dryers and ranges. Marvel at the abundance of natural light and ventilation. Tap on hardwood floors cut exclusively from sustainable forests.

Welcome to Portland's newest "green" building — energy-efficient, water-sparing and full of features stressing the natural over the chemical, the recycled over the new and the renewable over the finite. The 123-unit Henry is part of a wave of green projects sweeping the country and revolutionizing the way we design and build.

Whether the tag is "eco-friendly," "sustainable" or "high-performance," green buildings are going mainstream in a big way. In three years, the U.S. Green Building Council has certified 89 office or apartment buildings, manufacturing plants, condos, convention centers, schools and libraries. More than 1,100 buildings have applied for the council's Good Housekeeping-type seal of approval.

"It's not like putting on a hair shirt and moving into a cave," says Dennis Wilde, senior project manager for The Henry. "A green building doesn't look any different than what people are used to."

Once a fringe movement, a legacy of the 1970s energy crisis that never quite caught on, the green building boom is attracting converts as disparate as New York Gov. George Pataki, a Republican, and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, a Democrat who has vowed to make his city the USA's greenest.

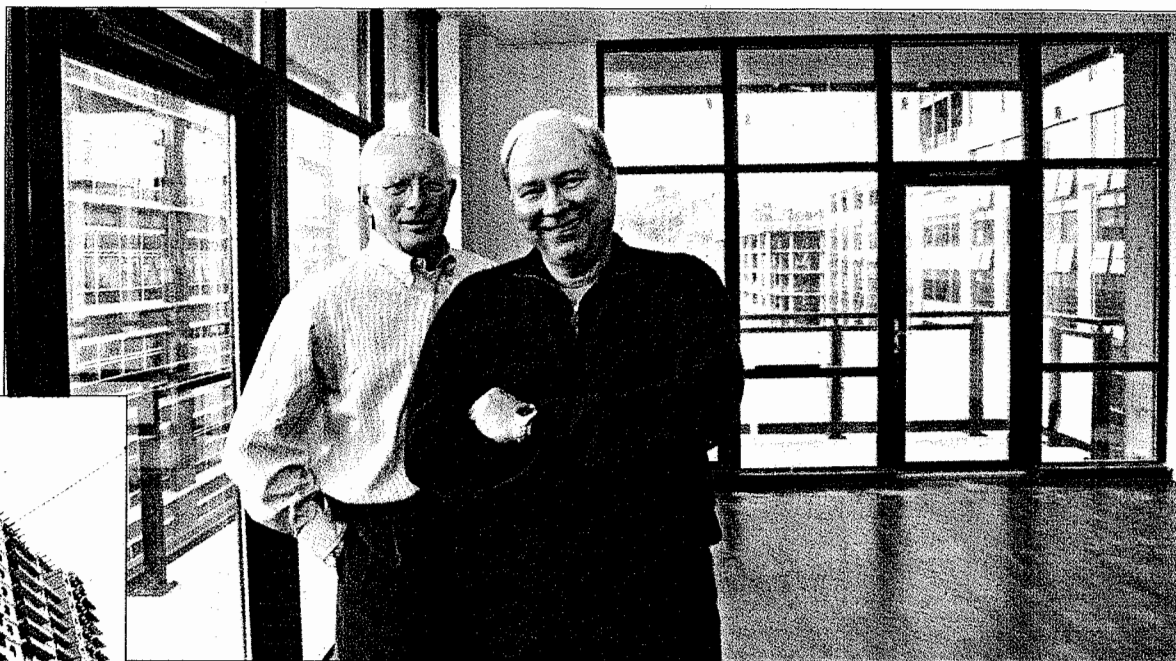
A growing number of cities and states insist on green features in buildings that get tax dollars. The federal government requires its new buildings to meet green standards. Foundations are making green design a condition for grants. Local gov-

ernments are adding "sustainability" to the job titles of planners and managers. Architecture students are pressuring universities for more courses in green design. Americans distressed by poor indoor air quality and "sick-building syndrome" are demanding fresher environments to live and work in.

Profit-driven developers and builders are going green because today's sustainable buildings are price-competitive with conventional ones. Manufacturers and suppliers of green building materials are rushing to cash in on an expanding mar-



The Henry: Condominiums were sold out nine months before the building was completed.



Photos by Alan S. Welner for USA TODAY

Inspired: Senior project manager Dennis Wilde, left, and developer Robert Gerding in a unit at The Henry in Portland, Ore.

ket. The initial cost to go green may be slightly higher, but the payback in energy efficiency, water conservation and worker productivity easily recoups those outlays, experts say.

"To build a green building is only very marginally more expensive, and that margin is decreasing all the time," says Scott Lewis, a green building consultant here.

The right thing to do

As cost fades as a hurdle, green building is gaining virtually unassailable status as the right thing to do. There's carping from a few critics that standards are sometimes too restrictive. Libertarians grouse when tax credits or grants subsidize green projects — though that's not what's fueling the trend, nor are such subsidies typically large.

An \$800,000 fund Portland set aside in 2001 to help green projects is nearly spent, and city officials have no plans to renew it. Long a hub of environmental activism and green values, Portland has a sustainable building ethic that is deep-rooted: 44 green buildings totaling 4 million square feet.

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The \$48.5 million, 15-story Henry, one of the country's first large residential buildings to go green, is the city's most expensive condo project: Prices range from \$280,000 for one-bedrooms to \$1.3 million for three-bedroom penthouse units. But it also sold out quicker than any other — the last condo was snapped up nine months before completion. Similarly, all 293 units in the 27-story Solaire green apartment building near Ground Zero in New York rented quickly — most at 4% to 5% above market rates.

"Sustainability was very important to us," says Mary Krueger, a database administrator who with her husband, Phil, bought a two-bedroom Henry unit after selling their four-bedroom suburban

house. "I'm real notorious as an avid recycler, just real conscious of what we use and what we do to the environment."

Industry standards and a scoring system, adopted in 2000, brought accountability and accelerated green building. The 4,000-member Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program (LEED) has become a benchmark followed by developers, architects and elected officials across the USA. Its sought-after silver, gold and platinum ratings verify the "greenness" of a project.

Just as studies show better test scores by students who learn in well-lighted spaces and higher retail sales in stores

Continued on 16A▶