

RENOVATING YOUR CONDO?

Make it Sustainable

by Mary Stanton

The new condominium landscape in Toronto is 'greener' than ever before, with an increasing supply of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified buildings coming on the market. For the environmentally concerned individual in the market for a new condominium, the choices are almost endless. However, what choice is there for an equally environmentally concerned person who already owns a condo in a pre-LEED era building?

Is it possible to transform an existing condo into a living space that is healthier and more environmentally sustainable? The answer is a resounding "Yes!"

By undertaking a sustainable renovation, you will not only bring health and environmental benefits into your daily life, but also add long-term economic value to your home, all without sacrificing style, elegance, comfort, or functionality. Sustainable renovation companies adhere to the same principles used for new buildings.

Designs that are sustainable and holistic

Sustainable design emphasizes the environmental, social, economic, and ecological aspects and consequences of design, by creating healthy, non-toxic living environments, and using recycled products where possible. Holistic design considers the space as an interconnected whole, and highlights aesthetics, functionality and consistency. Holistic designers attempt to design spaces with future needs in mind, so that additions, which could change the nature of the space, will not be needed.

Building materials should, as much as possible, come from renewable resources, produced in an environmentally friendly manner, sourced locally to avoid excessive transportation cost, and able to provide a healthy, non-toxic living environment.

Many of the building products described below are readily available from reputable Toronto building supply stores. Many are Canadian-made.

FLOORING | When choosing engineered or laminate flooring, look for Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified products. Buying products that carry

the FSC 'check-tree' label is a guarantee that the product comes from a forest evaluated against rigorous environmental and social standards, and made with low or no formaldehyde. Always choose sound proofing underlayment, adhesives, sealers, and cleaners with a low Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) rating. Carpets made of natural fibers, such as wool, silk, jute or of recycled synthetic fibers with low VOC are preferable. Want something different? Think leather flooring - durable and made of 100% recycled material.

CABINETRY | If wood is your preference, again look for the FSC certification. Medium or high density fibre board products (MDF and HDF) are extensively used when a painted finish is preferred. Whatever your choice, make sure to use low VOC stains, paints, and sealers.

WALL TREATMENTS | Use low VOC, odourless, natural, or organic paints. Elegant, sophisticated wallpapers made of recycled vinyl (SecondLook®), natural fibres (silk, linen, grass), or Ammolite® (woven glass yarns) will add interest to any room. Tiles, whether made of natural stone, recycled glass, porcelain, ceramic, metal or leather, have endless design applications.

COUNTERTOPS | Materials such as natural stones, stainless steel, quartz, and wood are standard features in new condominiums. Consider these innovative eco-friendly products: IceStone® (recycled glass in cement matrix), Eco-Line Glass2® (baked and fused recycled glass, no epoxy or resin, no sealer), Infinity® (engineered glass and marble, no epoxy, no sealer), or PaperStone® (recycled paper and low-VOC resin).

FURNITURE | Wooden furniture should be FSC certified. Major fabric manufacturers now offer 'eco-friendly' fabrics that are sustainable, organic and/or recycled.

DRYWALL, COMPOUNDS AND ADHESIVES | EcoRock® and QuietRock® are examples of the new breed of drywall. Fire-rated, moisture resistant and flexible drywall is also available. New drywall compounds contain dust control ingredients;

sprayed compounds contain recycled paper. Many adhesives today are low VOC rated.

Building materials should be energy efficient and promote energy conservation.

Buy EnergyStar® certified electrical and lighting products. Use compact fluorescent lights (CFL), or light emitting diodes (LED) for track or recessed lighting. Install occupancy sensors. Where possible, redesign the space to allow for more natural light.

Replace old plumbing fixtures with WaterSense® rated faucets, shower-heads and toilets (a City of Toronto program provides rebates of \$60 or \$75 to replace high-water-use toilets with water-efficient models).

Appliances with EnerGuide® certification are energy efficient (the City of Toronto rebate is \$60 on the purchase of a new front-loading washing machine). Improve air quality by changing air filters regularly, and replace old exhaust fan units with EnergyStar® certified models.

Practise responsible waste management.

Almost all material removed during renovation is recyclable, including lumber, drywall, glass, electrical

materials, plumbing fixtures, steel, plastics, cabinetry and appliances. Visit Toronto's Habitat for Humanity Re-Stores to purchase building materials for a fraction of the cost, or donate materials for a charitable donation tax receipt with a minimum donation of \$500. Explore local charities or municipal programs to deal with unwanted items. Some examples are The Furniture Bank, Heritage Skills Development (computers), and The Toronto Great Refrigerator Roundup.

By adhering to these basic principles of sustainable renovation, it is possible for anyone living in a pre-LEED era condominium to transform their existing living space into one that is healthier, aesthetically beautiful, efficient, and functional. The process will challenge your creativity, but the result will reward you with membership in Canada's ever-growing population of environmentally concerned citizens.

Mary Stanton is the Creative Director of Stanton Interiors, 2010 CDECA (Canadian Decorator's Association) Professional Decorating/Design Award Winner



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