

It ain't easy being green

It ain't easy being green. Kermit and Jim Ritchie both agree on that. Still, green is the favourite colour for Ritchie, senior VP of Marketing at Tridel Corp., where thinking "green" is corporate policy.

Building Green – designing and erecting buildings that are more energy efficient – is more expensive than traditional building methods. The incentive is, future energy savings translate into cash savings. However, Tridel won't own the buildings it builds. You do.

Ritchie said offering a more energy-efficient home – on top of all the other features Tridel puts into its condominium projects – is another innovation that helps maintain its position as one of Canada's biggest and most prominent condo developers.

Innovative trend setter is not a new role for Tridel in the homebuilding business. There are features in practically every high-rise condo in the country that can be traced back to the desk of Leo DelZotto.

DelZotto, president of Tridel Corp., was the first put wall-to-wall carpets in condos, first to create cantilevered solariums in condo suites, first to include an extensive recreation centre in the building and the first to put security-gated entrances to a condo project in Ontario.

He is one of three brothers that own Tridel. Father Jack DelZotto started building homes in Toronto in 1931. In the mid '70s the brothers changed the name from DelZotto Construction to Tridel. Three DelZotto brothers – Tri-del. Get it?

Leo is the hands-on leader of Tridel. His brother Angelo is chairman of the board and brother Elvio heads up the law firm DelZotto Zorzi.

In an interview, Leo says, "we're not just relying on better designs any more to keep us ahead of our competition. We're building in the technology to future proof our buildings... Behind the walls we're installing the wiring and hardware that'll let our buildings evolve with advances in technology. With the deregulation that is happening in so many services, we put a software package in each suite that'll let that individual residents choose their own provider of telephone, Internet, hydro and other services that'll come either under the ground or from up on the roof." Current concerns about costs and energy has Tridel leading the condominium industry into new thinking.

At Element, Tridel's new 22-storey condo nearing completion at Front Street and Blue Jay Way, air conditioning is supplied by cold water from deep out in Lake Ontario. Enwave District Energy Ltd. plans to cool 100 buildings in Toronto's core using cold water from five kilometers out in the lake and Element was the first residence in the city to sign up for the unique system.

Now Verve – Tridel's latest high-rise venture – will carry the energy-saving philosophy even further.

The 39-storey residential tower planned to rise on the site of the former Wellesley Hospital on Wellesley Avenue, just east of Jarvis, is slightly above the city's core, thus it won't be hooked up to Enwave. So Tridel's environmental team, which includes

Montreal-based consultant Jamie James, found new ways to save energy, like no longer exhausting warm air out into a cold winter city. The warm air in Verve's suites will be collected via the bathroom fan and sent up a duct to a heat exchange ventilator in the mechanical penthouse on the roof. There it will pass on its warmth to the fresh cold air being brought into the building, thus reducing the building's energy consumption to heat the incoming air by 20 per cent.

Overall, James expects a 35 per cent reduction in energy consumption by Verve, compared to traditionally built buildings of the same size – that may be the highest energy savings of any residential high-rise in Canada as measured by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, says James.

Of course, Tridel hasn't even broken ground yet on Verve, so many of these calculations are from computer-created models. Plus new equipment is being tested today at Grand Triomphe, the latest high-rise at Tridel's Northtown project on the east side of Yonge Street just south of Finch Avenue, where two experimental suites test new devices to reduce energy – like spray-on insulation foam from BASF, experimental windows and cabinets of wheat straw – free of formaldehyde common in particleboard cabinets.

The residents of the two suites at Grand Triomphe know they are living in guinea pig suites and Tridel is paying their utility bills for a year so the firm can regularly test the efficiency of the new devices.

Rambod Nasri heads of the R&D office at Tridel. He says the firm is now testing clothes dryers that don't need an external exhaust system.

Residents of Verve will also get to choose how much water they want to flush down the toilet after each visit. In less than technical terms, James noted it requires less water to change the scene "after going number one, than it does after going number two."

Verve residents will have dual flush toilets that lets them make the ultimate choice. Of course, there's more than just esthetics involved here. Each suite will have a smart meter keeping tract of how much water and energy the suite consumes. Resident's monthly maintenance fees will reflect that.

Monthly operation costs in most buildings are spread evenly among suites at so much per square foot. But at Verve, the guy who regularly has his CD player, TV and computer running until 3:15 a.m. while basking in the 78F degree temperature of his suite on cold February nights will pay a higher maintenance fee than the woman next door in the same size suite who has her temperature set at 52F while she spends February in Fort Lauderdale.

Shower heads mixing compressed air with water will reduce water usage, but retain oomph. And in the basement garage are two hybrid cars from Autoshare that residents can rent on an hourly basis. For more info on Verve, check out the Verve website www.tridelfilms.com