

Green is the New Black

BY MARIANNE A. CAMPOLONGO



Absolute Green Homes

PROPRIETOR:
Sylvain Coté

IN BUSINESS SINCE: 1982

Sustainability is the new buzzword in the homebuilding industry. But what does making your home “green” really mean? Is it using high-tech machinery to regulate temperature and humidity levels, retrofitting your HVAC systems to make it more energy efficient, or using closed cell foam insulation to capture heat that might otherwise be lost? Is it building with low-tech, durable materials such as reclaimed lumber, local maple from upstate New York, or sustainable bamboo to lessen a project’s environmental impact? Is it using surfaces that never need painting such as natural earth plaster or engineered PVC?

The answer, says Sylvain Coté, president and owner of Absolute Remodeling Corp, an award-winning green design/build firm, soon to be renamed Absolute Green Homes, is all of the above, and more. “Green construction is all about quality,” says Coté in his charming French Canadian accent, “and green construction doesn’t cost more than other quality construction.” Actually, local and reclaimed materials can actually cost less; improved energy-efficiency and durable materials lower maintenance costs. “But the real payback is that green homes are more comfortable and much healthier. And a healthier home is a happier home,” he contends, “and that leads to healthier, happier relationships.”

The tenets of green building are the use of local, reclaimed, or sustainable materials that are durable, low maintenance and easily disposed of at the end of their usable life, energy-efficiency, efficient use of space, and healthy indoor air quality. “Homes are complex machines that must be designed and assembled as such” Coté says.

From Artist to Builder

Coté began his career as commercial photographer in his native Canada. He supplemented his income working for his uncle, a general contractor and landlord, and continued to hone those skills building sets as a photog-

rapher’s assistant. Right before the market crash of October 1987, he landed a dream job with a leading photo studio in Manhattan, moving his pregnant wife and 4-year-old stepson to Coop City in the Bronx, only to see the company fold up soon thereafter he arrived.

Taking city buses with cans of paint and brushes “in one of those old-lady shopping carts,” he worked as a painting contractor to support his young family. Always eager to learn new things, he began attending seminars and expanded his business to custom cabinetry, kitchen and bathroom renovations, additions, and eventually new homes. Two decades later he continues to attend seminars around the country learning about environmentally responsible design, green building techniques and strategies. He is passionate on the subject, whether he is explaining how the right balance of humidity makes a home feel warmer on cold winter days or describing a passive wine cellar that retains a nearly perfect balance of temperature and humidity naturally, without electrical or mechanical equipment..

Zero means perfect

Coté’s first home, purchased in 2003 and rebuilt from the foundation up, was also his first green building project. It is a subtle blend of natural materials—a soaring stone fireplace, natural earth plaster, reclaimed wood floors, cabinetry, and rough-hewn beams inside—and cleverly designed shingles, decking and roofing all made from engineered materials outside. The light-filled, octagon-shaped house, overlooking Truesdale Lake in South Salem, is both his retreat and, like other homes he has renovated or built, a showcase for his company’s work and Coté’s artistic vision. The renovated house scored a 36 on the HERS (Home Energy Rating Scale), which determines how energy—efficient a home is, with zero being the absolute score. That means he can power, heat and cool the house for nearly a year spending only what a typical household spends in four months. Although a home only needs an 86 HERS rating to be Energy Star certified and the project has garnered awards both for design and for being so green, if he were renovating it today, he said, “I would like to make it a ‘ZEH’—a zero energy home, the ultimate home.”

Coté’s extensive website www.absolutegreenhomes.com also showcases his work and provides a wealth of information about eco-friendly building and energy efficiency.

A natural optimist and philosopher, Coté says, “The future is bright. The recession has been good for people by focusing them on what a home should be—not a short-term investment; it should be a sanctuary.

The focal point of your life should be your family. Your home is where everything comes together or falls apart. It is a place to socialize, to recuperate. It should make you feel better, healthier. Every job we do makes people’s lives better.”