

COMPLIMENTARY
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This is the first installment of OBM International's series, "Building Green."
This month's article discusses the importance of environmental sustainability.



The built environment has a profound impact on our natural environment, enormously impacting the design, construction and operation process. Did you know that buildings account for as much greenhouse emissions as transportation and industry in the world? It is often overlooked that buildings are one of the biggest source of energy consumption and emissions around the world and consume more energy and materials than any other thing on our planet. The United States and Canada are actively demanding a drastic reduction in greenhouse emissions, on

fuel dependency and in the conservation of natural resources and habitats.

In Turks and Caicos and across the Caribbean, when designing and building, we must be especially mindful of energy consumption and efficiency as our costs to generate power far exceed that of North America. In addition, we must preserve our natural resources as they are what make the Caribbean unique. We must prevent the loss of natural, biologically diverse habitats because the relatively rapid recent development of the islands can potentially have a dramatic affect on the sustainability and quality of life for future generations.

Fortunately, across the world, "green" building practices have become more widely requested and implemented. These methods reduce or eliminate negative environmental impacts, and improve existing unsustainable design, construction and operational practices. More homeowners are becoming aware of the environmental crisis and are turning to their design professionals for the best possible solution for their project. With many innovative, eco-friendly technologies currently on the market, as well as proven design techniques that aim to significantly reduce the negative impact on the environment, "going green" is becoming easier and more popular. Moreover, the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program is at the forefront in helping to improve building industry standards. LEED is a rating system, which evaluates environmental performance from a whole building perspective over a building's life cycle, providing a definitive standard for what constitutes a green building. The system rigorously

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evaluates all aspects of the design, construction and operation, such as the selection of and design response to the site, the choice of paint and other building materials, and the design and operation of electrical and plumbing equipment. The aim is to achieve certification in one of four ratings categories: Certified, Silver, Gold or Platinum. But can these standards be applied to a single-family home?

Jamey Richards, Project Architect for OBM TCI, is in the process of becoming a LEED accredited design professional. When asked about applying these standards to residences, he states:

"The LEED system is becoming increasingly prevalent in the US, with many corporate and governmental organisations now insisting that new projects attain at least Silver or Gold certification," says Mr. Richards. "Although the system has generally been applied to commercial projects, the design principles and construction practices required to meet the standards can and should be applied to all building projects, including smaller scale private residences, new buildings or conversions."

In Turks and Caicos, we are fortunate that most homeowners are keen to build and live in harmony with their site. However it is not simply a question of blending in with the landscape. It takes a particularly determined and forward-thinking owner, a creative and knowledgeable

design team, and a considerate and careful builder to ensure that the entire process results in a truly sustainable building. Our particular environment presents us with great opportunities and challenges: we have great potential to design our buildings to take advantage of cooling breezes and sheltering shade elements, but we are dependent upon the importation of almost all our building materials; we have the potential to tap into the renewable energy sources of the wind and sun, but we must be prepared for potentially devastating storm activity.

Whatever the challenges, the time for complacency is over. We all need to look very hard at our lifestyles, and consider what we can do to minimise our impact on the natural environment, which, in Turks and Caicos in particular, is critical to our future economy. All of us involved in design and construction are in an influential position – the way we design and use our buildings needs to be understood and addressed so that we do everything we can to act positively. ■

next month...

In the next installment of the Building Green series, we will interview a future Green-homeowner and discuss the considerations taken in the design of their home.



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