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# Green Buildings: The New Rule



Visionaire pool

**F**ocusing on the environment and being conscious of where (and how) we live is becoming increasingly important to us. These days it feels like everything we do—from the type of bags we choose in which to tote home our groceries to how we dispose of our garbage—is under scrutiny. Such heightened awareness is justified since there is plenty of room for improvement in our lives. That especially pertains to the place we call home. We're not talking about living cleaner but about living greener; tailoring our existence to conserve more of the earth's resources.

One major way of improving our lives and preserving the planet has been in the creation of "green" buildings. Developers have become savvy and are either adding green elements to already-existing structures or creating green buildings from the ground-up. Many hope their projects can earn LEED certification (Leadership in Energy Efficient Design) from the United States Green Building Council. It is a stamp of approval for buildings that are sustainable or energy-saving in some way. Four award certification levels range from certified to silver to gold to the coveted platinum.

Perhaps the most important eco-

friendly element that many new green buildings boast: the assurance of clean air thanks to gas- and chemical-free air conditioning units, chemical-free kitchen and bath cabinets, and low-voc (volatile organic compounds) paint on walls. Oftentimes insulation within walls is made from non-toxic materials like recycled denim instead of fiberglass.

A noble goal for many buildings going for the green label is to reduce dependence on local sources of energy and instead to produce their own. Installation of photovoltaic panels to collect solar rays is one way of doing this. They help produce electricity, meaning they help heat water. A green roof can also diminish the need for cooling the indoors, further reducing reliance on outside electricity.

In Manhattan, one green building for which buyers are clamoring is The Visionaire in Battery Park City. Going up on the last plot for residential development in the area, the 35-story/235-unit condominium is a joint venture between Starwood Capital Group and the Albanese Organization, which previously created two green projects—The Verdesian and The Solaire (the first residential tower in the

U.S. to earn LEED gold certification).

Designed by Rafael Pelli of the renowned firm Pelli Clarke Pelli, The Visionaire is aiming to achieve LEED platinum status. Some strides toward that goal include a gray water system that will feature a 10,000-gallon recycled water storage tank to irrigate a green roof among many things. Individual units will boast programmable, digital thermostats to finely control energy use. Integrated solar panels will provide five percent of the project's energy needs, and the building's distinctive curved design mixing terracotta, steel, and glass will help decrease the consumption of energy to thirty-five percent over code. One green aspect already in place for buildings in the city: the public transportation infrastructure eliminates the need for any driving to be done, thereby reducing carbon emissions.

Marketing executives associated with The Visionaire project have reported "an incredible pent up demand for this building." And, it is no surprise. As our existence becomes greener every day, green buildings will soon become the rule instead of the exception, assuring many more happy and healthy residents. ■