

PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS AND VENDORS HOP ON THE BANDWAGON

By Barbara L. Nelson

Editor

Now that green is the buzzword in responsible building, many manufacturers have changed their product lines to reflect the surge of environmental awareness and demand amongst developers, designers and builders.

From bamboo flooring and carpeting to energy-efficient HVAC systems, numerous environmentally sustainable products have been made available recently. This signals a major change from just a few years ago when sustainable design was in its infancy in New York City. Still, accumulating enough points for a US Green Building Council LEED certification remains a challenge.

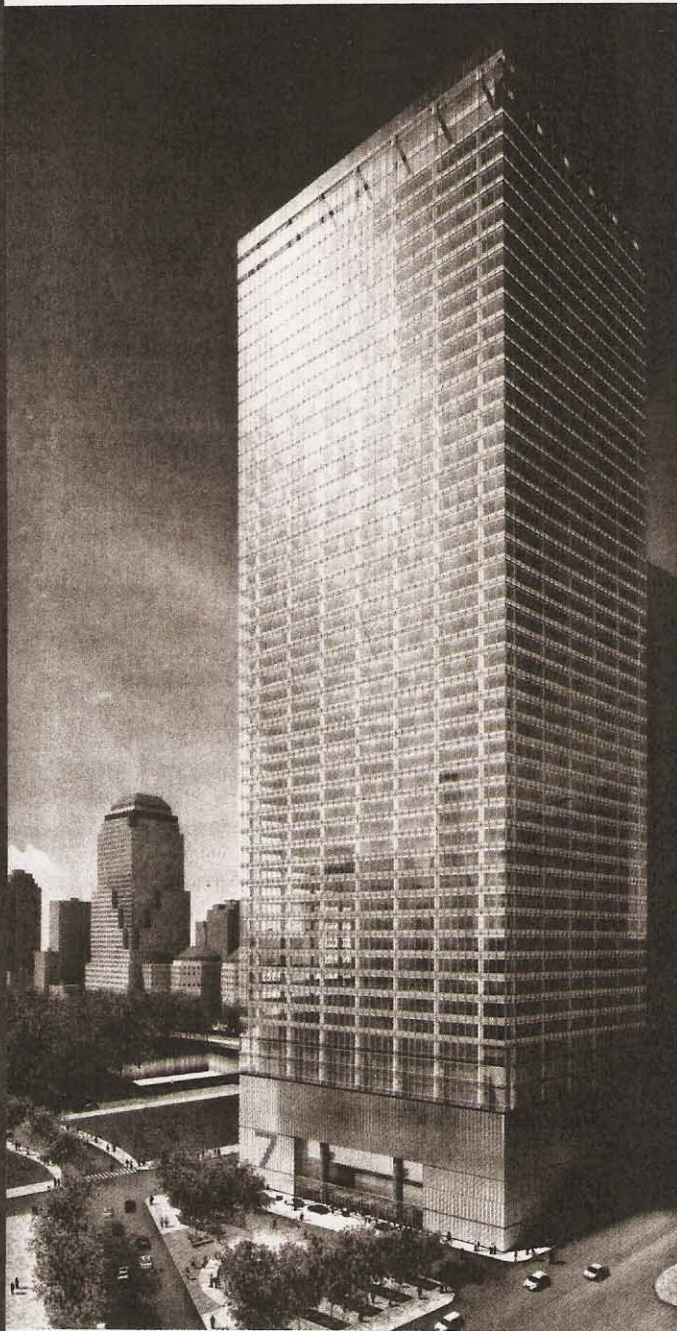
LEED was created by the USGBC to establish a common standard of measurement for what constitutes a "green" building, evaluating several areas including sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, and indoor environmental quality. Within these areas, points are awarded, and the number of points a project earns determines the level of certification the building will be awarded. There are four progressive levels of certification: Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum.

"Five years ago there almost no awareness of any of these issues," says Dale E. Peterson, principal, Mancini Duffy. "Now, there are many projects going through the USGBC LEED rating system. Design teams, contractors and manufactures are all developing a body of expertise. Many products now are being tailored towards these requirements. There's been, absolutely, huge growth."

No one knows about the growth of green product demand more than Eleanor Shtytser, owner of Floor Fantasy, a bamboo flooring business. Installing bamboo flooring satisfies the credit for rapidly renewable materials, low-emitting materials, and local regional materials. For the past seven years, Shtytser has attended industry events and met with anyone expressing even a glimmer of interest in bamboo flooring, toting her cumbersome flooring samples with her. Not many listened.

"Nobody knew bamboo as a product three years ago," says Shtytser. "Now, people already know when I get there why they should choose bamboo. We are installing the flooring in residential and commercial projects, in luxury rentals, and residential facilities for Columbia University. A lot of residential developers in Manhattan and New Jersey are going with bamboo."

Like Shtytser, "many vendors are actually now taking the time to



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read the LEED rating system," says Peterson. "They understand how their products have an impact on different credits and are coming to us with information that's really tailored toward LEED. Will the rating system itself get simpler? Perhaps, but not necessarily in the way manufacturers want. It's not manufacturer-driven. Manufacturers are going to have to work hard in some cases to figure out how their products fit into a green project."

The carpeting industry has done its homework. Since 1992, the Carpet and Rug Institute has developed and administered the "Green Label" testing and labeling program, first for carpet and then for adhesives and cushion materials. The testing programs identify low-emitting products, requiring that representative product samples meet scientifically established standards. "The Carpet & Rug Institute has a certification system called Green Seal Plus carpet that feeds directly into the USGVC LEED Certification credit system," says Peterson. "So if you buy a carpet that has a Green Seal Plus, you can get the LEED point for carpet."

But there are still products that need to be investigated further to see if the manufacturer or vendor is providing you with a green product or what the industry calls "green wash."

"It is basically what the manufacturer says, but there are ways to verify that the product is what they are saying about it," says Erica Godun, an associate at FXFOWLE and the head of FXFOWLE's internal sustainability group, 'Team Green.' "For wood products there's the Forest Stewardship Counsel certification," she adds. "It certifies the wood all the way from harvest from the forest through the final product. They do chain of custody all the way to the site."

While pricing for some green products are comparable to non-green products that's not the case for all products. "Yes, prices are coming down, but it depends on what the product is," explains Godun. "For instance, with carpet, you can get recycled content, recycled backing, low VOCs in most of the manufacturer's lines at their normal pricing. You wouldn't be paying any more for it. But for FSC certification, those woods almost always cost more, because of the process they go through to get the certification."

Even companies that aren't vying for the LEED certification are installing green products to save money. Credit Suisse's New York headquarters, located at 11 Madison Ave. was recognized last year by the city and state for installing New York City's largest ice-storage based air-conditioning system.

"In the past in New York there was a lot of apprehension—people were saying 'If I'm going to be green it's going to cost me a lot of money,'" says David R. Pospisil, marketing & communica-

tions manager with Trane New York/New Jersey. "We are seeing those rumors fall by the wayside."

The chiller system allows Credit Suisse to lower their facility's peak energy usage by 900kWh, and reduce overall electric usage by 2.15 million kWh. "We are saving \$1 million in energy costs per year," says William Beck, managing director, head of critical engineering systems at Credit Suisse. "We wanted to go as green as possible, while fully operating the building with no interruption in service."

"When you are able to save as much money as we are seeing at some of these corporate jobs, it's going to catch on," Pospisil says. "You are burning less fossil fuel. You are using less energy. You are using less natural resources. So the long-term sustainable impact on the environment is positive. You are delivering high-quality at less and it's helpful to the environment." Trane systems have been installed in buildings for Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Bloomberg and The Durst Organization, he adds.

The latest in green product and services is green-cleaning of commercial and residential buildings. Guardian Service Industries as well as several other cleaning

companies are using green products and methods to clean buildings. "The green movement is expanding as more and more companies embrace environmental sustainability," says Michael Eisenberg, senior vice president with Guardian. "Client response to our green initiative has been simply unbelievable."

Guardian undertook extensive testing of a variety of products from various suppliers to find the best performing green products available. During that process, it determined that the quality and effectiveness of green-cleaning far exceeds the conventional cleaning methods now in use throughout the industry. The benefits of environmentally responsible building cleaning services include improved indoor air quality, lower water and air pollution levels, decreased absenteeism and increased employee efficiency and productivity, says Eisenberg.

Guardian's green cleaning services currently extends to over 6,000 clients occupying in excess of 70 million sf of commercial space in Manhattan and throughout the Northeast, including bank branches, institutions, loft buildings, schools, medical facilities, shopping centers and theatres.

Nearly everyone, it seems, is finding a way to go green these days.