

LEED by example

BY SHELLEY PENNER & ROBIN MCINTOSH PHOTO COURTESY OF PENNER & ASSOCIATES



INTERIOR DESIGNERS ARE familiar with sustainable design concepts: using resources efficiently, reducing energy consumption and creating interiors with good indoor air quality. On one level, there is increasing use of green products — designers are becoming better consumers.

There is, however, a great opportunity to deepen the practice of interior design by using a holistic approach often described as the “triple bottom line.” This view interprets “sustainability” as human, environmental and economic sustainability. Far from being competing agendas, they are interconnected and can actually reinforce each other. A successful solution that places equal importance on environmental stewardship, human well-being and economic profitability will reap many benefits.

Many studies have shown that features common in sustainable design, such as access to daylight and views, and user-controllability of systems, contribute to the health and well-being of the occupants. Environmental stewardship reduces greenhouse gas emissions, reduces energy and water consumption, uses resources more efficiently, produces less waste, and improves air quality. Green strategies and human well-being both have positive economic benefits. Additional initial costs for green strategies are recouped within a reasonable payback period. Capital costs may be reduced by optimizing building systems such as lighting and HVAC. Other economic benefits include improved marketability, lower operating costs, reduced liability risk, higher building value,

increased employee productivity, and reduced absenteeism and turnover.

We have found LEED, for Commercial Interiors (LEED-CI) is one tool for incorporating the “triple bottom line” into our work. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) comprises a family of green building rating systems that are intended to encourage the development of buildings that are environmentally responsible, profitable, and healthy places to live and work. The LEED Green Building Rating System has grown exponentially in North America in the past few years and increasingly governments, institutions and other organizations are mandating it as the standard for their new buildings and fit-ups.

LEED-CI is of particular interest for interior designers because it applies to tenant improvements in commercial, institutional and government projects. It was developed and is currently administered by the USGBC. Eventually, the CaGBC will adapt and administer LEED-CI in Canada.

Like the other LEED rating systems, LEED-CI is a points-based system with different levels of certification — Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum. Points are achieved in each of the six sustainable categories by meeting certain credit requirements. Categories include Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy & Atmosphere, Materials & Resources, Indoor Environmental Quality, and Innovation & Design Process. With the exception of Sustainable Sites, there are credits in every category that interior designers

Walter C. Koerner Library, 7th Floor Lobby at UBC


can contribute their expertise to, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving a higher level of certification. One of the benefits of LEED is that it encourages a team approach that requires relevant disciplines to become engaged early in the process.

Interior designers specialize in design that balances many criteria:

- Well-being of the occupants
- Business success of the stakeholders and significance of budget and schedule
- Durability and performance of materials and products
- Beauty expressed by materials, colour, light, form and volume
- Experiential quality of the space

Green strategies need to be integral to design, not applied after-thoughts, and work in concert with the other project parameters.

One of LEED's stated intents is to transform the marketplace and it appears to be working. Many leading-edge manufacturers are bringing out innovative materials, products and technologies that can contribute to achieving credits and points. Some, however, are making inflated claims about points their product can earn. Comprehensive knowledge and application of LEED-CI will aid designers to sift out the less helpful product claims.

Like any tool, LEED has its uses and limitations. The value is in its intent of reducing the environmental impact of the building industry. The risk is in simply point-chasing, and ignoring other sustainable strategies that may not garner points. By continuing to educate ourselves on environmental issues, interior designers can make a well-balanced and holistic contribution to the project team. 

Shelley Penner is principal of Penner & Associates Interior Design Inc, a Vancouver-based interior design firm specializing in green design. Robin McIntosh is an associate at the firm. Both are LEED® Accredited Professionals. Penner & Associates is a member of the Canada Green Building Council.

LEED is administered by the US Green Building Council (USGBC) and the Canada Green Building Council (CaGBC). The CaGBC recently developed and launched LEED Canada-NC Version 1.0 For New Construction & Major Renovations.

USGBC LEED Green Building Rating Systems are currently available for:

- LEED-NC (New Commercial Construction and Major Renovation)
- LEED-EB (Existing Building Operations)
- LEED-CI (Commercial Interiors)

LEED-CS (Core and Shell), LEED-H (Homes) and LEED-ND (Neighbourhood Development) are under development.

For more information, visit USGBC (www.usgbc.org) and CAGBC (www.cagbc.org).



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