

Green Benefits

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Although green building elements are not the foremost reason for a condo sale, developer says that it “certainly doesn’t hurt.”

By Joe Florkowski

Building green can’t hurt.

At least, that’s the philosophy of the developers of Luma, a new 19-story condominium project in downtown Los Angeles.

Nearly halfway complete, the \$77 million Luma building is expected to receive LEED silver certification when it is finished in the spring.

Having the LEED certification is just one more aspect that might draw buyers to these downtown lofts, said Tom Cody, principal of The South Group, which is developing Luma.

“Why did we sell Luma out in eight hours? I don’t think that it’s because it’s a LEED-certified building, but that certainly doesn’t hurt,” Cody said.

Luma will include 236 lofts, which range from 750 sq. ft. to 3,500 sq. ft. Prices begin in the \$400,000s.

Luma is the second of three high-rise condominium projects that The South Group is building in downtown Los Angeles. The first project, Elleven, is built and the third, Evo, is not yet under construction. All three buildings, though, are on the same block in Los Angeles, between 11th and 12th streets and Hope Street and Grand Avenue.



The South Group’s Luma condo building will join the developer’s two other sustainable projects, Elleven and Evo, in downtown Los Angeles (photo by Joe Florkowski).

Luma will include such green building aspects as using environmentally friendly wood products and installing highly-efficient windows, said Joe Martino, regional manager for Howard S. Wright Construction Co., the general contractor for the project.

The project is also seeking to retain much of its building materials from within the Southern California region, which is

another element that can help a building achieve LEED certification.

Building green does cost a little more than building with regular materials, Martino said, although he could not estimate how much more.

But the benefits of green building can pay off on certain types of projects, Martino said. For instance, a compa- >>

Project Team

Owner The South Group

General Contractor Howard S. Wright

Architect Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects

Electrical Contractor Morrow Meadows

Masonry Contractor Frank S. Smith Masonry Inc.

Plumbing Contractor Murray Plumbing & Heating Co.

ny that builds a project using solar power can sell that energy back to the power grid.

Ankrom Moisan Associated Architects discussed a lot of big green-building ideas when designing Luma, said Murray Jenkins, project manager for the architect firm.

But because some of those big ideas were too costly or not feasible, Ankrom Moisan instead went subtler, Jenkins said.

"We were a little more careful in installing a lighting system," Jenkins said. "We're a little more careful in installing a plumbing system."

One of the key things about obtaining the LEED certification is documenting everything, he said.

For example, if the contractor is building using local supplies, the location of that material needs to be listed.

"To get LEED certification, it requires a large amount of paperwork," Jenkins said.

And some of the things Ankrom Moisan is having installed may not even qualify for the LEED certification, Jenkins said.

For example, planters installed around the building will allow water to go through the soil and enter the ground, he said.

Architects enjoy designing green buildings, Jenkins added. Buildings use a lot of resources and can be a large source for emissions. Reducing that impact is something architects like to do, he said.



A spring completion is scheduled for Luma (photo by Joe Florkowski).

"It's certainly something we feel proud of," Jenkins said. "It is a fun challenge."

But building green poses some challenge for developers because there are few incentives available for them to build residential green projects.

The Southern California Gas Co. has a program available called Savings By Design that offers rebates to builders who develop non-residential projects that reduce energy use.

But for residential projects, little rebate options exist, Cody said.

However, Cody added that such residential projects do get some credit—from the customers.

Some customers who have bought lofts in The South Group's other LEED certified projects have reported saving money on their monthly utility bills, Cody said.

"The buyers have come back to us. We have gotten letters from people saying, 'Thank you,'" he said. <<