



Building healthy homes is about selecting products “that don’t off-gas, that are formaldehyde-free and have low or no VOC content,” Empire president Kevin Mullen says. *EMPIRE CUSTOM*

HEALTHY AND BEAUTIFUL

Homes should not cause allergy and breathing issues — it’s a matter of builders taking more time and care

ANDREA COX

The concept of living in a healthy and sustainable home is gaining ground, and the demand is upping the ante when it comes to design.

“As a society we have become very focused on wellness and fitness, eating organically, wanting to know where our food comes from, but we have never asked any of those questions about our homes and I think that is to our detriment,” says Kevin Mullen, president of Calgary-based Empire Homes.

Empire Homes is taking note and making health a priority, putting the emphasis on homes that are healthy for both the environment and for people living in them.

The company is creating a collection of 19 luxurious, healthy homes in the inner-city master-planned community of Currie, developed by Canada Lands Co. All homes will be constructed to Built Green specifications and Empire’s Reside specifications, a comprehensive grouping of initiatives designed to ensure healthy air quality.

The two-storey homes will ring Valour Park and feature contemporary lines with plenty of brick, stone, stucco and concrete, not to mention gorgeous kitchens, compliments of Empire Kitchen & Bath.

“Healthy and beautiful go hand in hand,” Mullen says, also noting that building a home with healthy materials costs the same.

“It’s really about researching and selecting better products, ones that don’t off-gas, that are formaldehyde-free and have low or no VOC content,” he says.

VOC is the acronym used for volatile organic compounds, compounds that can wreak havoc on our health, as we breathe in their fumes. Resins, glues, flooring, carpet, paint, particle board, dry wall, insulation — it all emits gases.

“We take for granted that the manufacturer and the builder are thinking about this. But often it is not true. What is the first thing that most builders do? Move the homeowner into their new home as quickly as possible, often the day after it’s been painted and glues and silicones and finishes have been applied. And people wonder why they are getting headaches or their kids can’t breathe,” he says.

Les Wold, sales and marketing manager at Effect Homes in Edmonton, agrees.

“It is so important to be attentive to products, to have hard surfaces and natural floorings,” he says.

Wold says that with the uptick in allergies, consumers are coming to them much more informed.

“They are wanting a much more holistic approach to home building. They want a well-built, energy efficient home that will stand the test of time and provide a comfortable and healthy place for their families to live,” he says.

Effect Homes has won numerous awards for its sustainable



This home, designed by Effect Homes in Edmonton’s Windsor Park, is 68 per cent more energy efficient than standard. *EFFECT HOMES*



The home by Effect Homes located in Windsor Park is not only efficient, it has great curb appeal with its modern design. *EFFECT HOMES*



Consumers “are wanting a much more holistic approach to home building,” says Les Wold of Effect Homes. *EFFECT HOMES*

home designs, including the Canadian Home Builders Association’s (CHBA) Green Home of the Year — the builder won at both the provincial and national level for a net-zero home in Edmonton’s Belgravia area. The use of passive design techniques, including window placement and materials chosen for their long-term durability and lack of off-gassing. The home features, for example, polished concrete floors throughout that keep costs comparable.

Effect Homes, a custom home builder and renovator like Empire Homes, is passionate about what

it does and is walking the talk. It has recently renovated a duplex in need of some TLC in Edmonton’s up and coming Bonnie Doon community, moving the company’s offices into the space.

“Our offices really showcase what can be done and it gets us so excited,” Wold says.

Healthy materials and hard surfaces combine with beautiful design and energy efficiency. The offices are off the grid, with solar generating enough power to run lighting and computer systems. That power is stored on-site in batteries.



The Belgravia Green net-zero energy home, by Effect Homes in Edmonton, has won awards from the Canadian Home Builders’ Association. *EFFECT HOMES*



The Belgravia Green net-zero energy home uses materials chosen for their long-term durability and lack of off-gassing. *EFFECT HOMES*



Kevin Mullen, president of Calgary-based Empire Homes, is a big believer in better research leading to better products. *EMPIRE CUSTOM HOMES*

“Homes definitely can be beautiful, energy-efficient and healthy,” Wold says, highlighting another example, a home in Edmonton’s Windsor Park area.

The home, which looks as if it belongs on the pages of Architectural Digest, is 68 per cent more energy efficient than a standard home, with 27 solar panels on its rooftop generating an 8.25-kilowatt solar electric system. But it is all about supply and demand, Empire’s Mullen notes, relating it to consumer demand for organic foods.

“As people begin to really demand this, more and more healthy

products will be available in the market. When we first started focusing on healthy homes in 2016, we couldn’t source formaldehyde-free products in the local market anywhere,” he says. “Now they are trickling in.”

Empire will not build with a product unless it is stamped formaldehyde-free by a third-party inspector. Wold notes it is a natural progression for people to want sustainable, energy efficient and healthy homes, both for the environment and for the owner.

“This really is the way of the future,” Wold says.