

HOMES & CONDOS

MASON HOMES

How 'green' became this family's golden rule

TRACY HANES
TORONTO STAR

Long before "green" was the gold standard, builder Gord Mason was a firm believer in sustainability.

A couple of decades ago, he went to considerable trouble to save a huge willow tree on a lot in Scarborough where he was building a house, only to have the new homeowner cut it down days after the sale closed.

"Back then, people didn't care," he says. They also paid little attention to the energy efficiency of their homes or how materials were used or discarded.

"Now we know how wasteful we've been, but then nobody would listen," recalls Mason. "Now, we're more aware. I knew it was the way to go. You look at how automobiles have changed so they are smaller, better designed and more fuel efficient."

Mason Homes has applied a similar theory of sound design and efficiency to its home projects and it's proven to be successful. At the recent EnerQuality Awards, the company garnered three top honours, including for best green sales team, Energy Star Builder of the Year, and Green Builder of the Year. It was also the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) Green Builder of the Year last year. Not bad at all for a company that builds mainly in small communities such as Peterborough, Lindsay, Uxbridge and Barrie, when the competition includes some of Toronto's biggest builders.

Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of the company founded by



Mason Homes' Avonlea community in Peterborough is built on New Urbanism principles with attractive streetscapes, ponds, parks and trails. Many of the Victorian and Arts & Crafts homes have garages at the rear.

Mason, who grew up as the son of a Toronto contractor who worked for wealthy clients including E.P. Taylor. In the backyard of the family's 2,000-square-foot bungalow was his dad's millwork shop where he made trim, framing, window sashes, etc. The younger Mason learned "to do the best job you can", as his father's business was built on referral.

Mason studied architecture at Ryerson University and then went to work at his dad's window company (Mason Windows) which grew from a backyard operation to a company with three factories.

He built houses on the side before forming Mason Homes 49 years ago. His company established a solid reputation for its quality building and prided itself on meeting deliv-

ery dates.

Several years ago, when Gord's son Sean, who'd been working in finance on Bay St., and daughter Ashley joined the company, the Masons decided to be on the leading edge of the green building movement. Sean is vice president of sales and marketing and Ashley is vice president of residential and commercial land development.

Mason starting building green in 2004, constructing the first occupied Energy Star home in Ontario and became the first builder to offer it as standard on all the homes it sold. The company launched its own Green for Life brand, which includes Energy Star as well as water and resource-conserving features and systems to provide better indoor air quality.

Mason builds everything from custom luxury homes to townhouse projects to detached home subdivisions. Peterborough's Avonlea is a prime example of its green ideals.

The master-planned community is built on New Urbanism principles, rear laneways and generous green spaces. The bungalows and two-storey homes are compact, ranging in size from about 1,200 to 2,400 square feet on 27-, 36-, 46- and 54-foot lots. Prices start in the \$220,000s. There are 15 homes still available in the first phase of 96 lots. A second phase will be launched later this year.

The small, energy efficient homes bucked the "bigger is better" trend at the time, especially in Peterborough, where land is not as scarce as

CURRENT PROJECTS

- **Avonlea:** In Peterborough. Bungalows and two storeys on 27-, 36-, 46- and 54-foot lots. Prices start in the low \$220,000s.
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- Visit www.masonhomes.ca for more information.

in the GTA and 27-foot lots were an anomaly.

"What is the ultimate resource? It's land," says Sean Mason. (There are only a handful of 54-foot lots in Avonlea's 96-home first phase).

Initially, the project faced stiff opposition from city council and ratepayers because of the laneway design and higher density. Eventually, it did get approval and Mason went on to sweep the Peterborough Kawartha Home Builders Association Awards in 2009, including Builder of the Year, Project of the Year and for Green Excellence.

For Gord Mason, the growing public appetite for green is an idea whose time has finally arrived.

"It's nice that the message got out and the public started to embrace it," he says. "I knew it would come."

TRASH TALK

This Room-Mate could soothe separation anxiety

ELLEN MOORHOUSE
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Alfredo Marciano has come up with the perfect name for his invention: Room-Mate.

It's a small companionable bin affair that can hang out in just about any room and let you sort your trash into recycling, organics and garbage on the spot. There are also slots for add-on containers for dead batteries, light bulbs and any other material that needs to be kept out of the regular garbage stream.

This little separation centre is only 7 1/2-inches wide and can be tucked away in the smallest spaces—under a desk, beside the toilet, in a bedroom corner—anywhere in the house where garbage is generated and sorting would make life easier. The Brampton resident sent

Trash Talk an email following the column about Oakville builders Catherine Ann Marshall and Michael Manning and their quest for the perfect bin solutions for kitchen and bathroom.

Marciano came up with his idea after a family trip to Nova Scotia three years ago.

"Over there, they're recycling machines. The kitchen itself had a pull-out drawer system," he says of the place they rented. "The only problem was there wasn't one in every room of the house."

If garbage could be easily separated elsewhere in the home—tissues in the green bin, paper and cardboard in recycling—he thought the amount of trash going to landfill could be further reduced.

Marciano's invention somewhat

resembles a car console where you stash your cups and change. He has spent \$40,000 to \$50,000 developing it.

It's made of recycled polypropylene plastic, with removable bin inserts for easy disposal. Each receptacle has a painted top, with the handle coloured to identify the type of trash. He's tested his prototype with 20 households representing a demographic mix.

"The only negative comment was from one person who had a giant hairspray bottle that stuck out the top," says Marciano, who promptly enlarged the largest bucket size by an inch.

Marciano's 10-litre Room-Mate will sell for \$19.99. Trouble is, he needs large-volume orders so he can afford to have the moulds made and go into production. He plans to manufacture locally.

So his invention is temporarily on hold. To generate revenue, he has sourced other bin systems from China and is marketing them. More expensive, they're made out of metal, and range in size from a small 10-litre set of two bins (\$30 or \$40 for three) to a 70-litre duo (\$160). The larger twinned bins have sensors that open at the wave of a hand. Markham bought 25 of these, he says, as part of its waste reduction bid for municipal offices. Hotels are also buying the product.

He's hoping for some large orders of these products as well, which will allow him to import a container-load and reduce his costs.



ELLEN MOORHOUSE PHOTO

Alfredo Marciano and his Room-Mate bin that allows for sorting of trash into recycling, organics and garbage.

To support his venture, Marciano continues to work part-time in commissioned sales and, thanks to a friend, has the free use of office and storage space in a Brampton industrial strip, sharing quarters with a credit counselling organization where his wife, India West, is an administrator. They have two children, 7 and 12.

His products are posted on his website (www.ecobinsolutions.com), which he says is a work in progress, and he's beating the bushes for orders, approaching municipalities, hotels, universities and businesses.

Trash Talk appears Saturdays in New in Homes & Condos. Send comments to e_moorhouse@sympatico.ca.

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