

# Sowing greener pastures indoors

*Ecofriendly firms create productive, PC workspaces*

BY AARON DALTON

Early next year, 2,000 Hearst Corp. employees will move to the cutting edge.

At the company's new West 57th Street headquarters, they will walk on carpets and tile floors made

from recycled materials such as tires and bottles. Office walls are covered in low-vapor paints and concrete surfaces are finished with a low-toxicity water-based sealant. Many of the employees will sit at formaldehyde-free Steelcase workstations, which also boast a high percentage of recycled content.

"Every part of the building has been looked at with a green eye," says Brian Schwagerl, Hearst's director of real estate and facilities planning.



On the heels of the first push toward environmentally friendly buildings—structures that focused

**GREEN-EYED MANTRA:** Rodale's designers made a point of using floors made of bamboo, a resource that replenishes itself faster than hardwood does.

on improving energy efficiency through advances in insulation, lighting and ventilation—another movement has emerged. Corporations such as Hearst are

taking their ecological concerns indoors to their work spaces.

A crop of sensitively appointed spaces is beginning to blossom across the city. Projects include headquarters for publisher Rodale Inc. at 733 Third Ave., The New York Times Co. at Times Square and the Wildlife Conservation Society at the Bronx Zoo.

"We are seeing a growing trend among clients who are coming to talk to us about projects where we might include sustainability and green design," says Guy Geier, a principal in the interiors practice at Fox & Fowle Architects.

While green furnishings can cost as much as 10% more up front, tenants figure they'll get a big payoff down the road in the form of lower levels of chemical irritants in the atmosphere. According to some studies, better air quality can translate directly into improved employee performance. One company saw a 40% drop in absenteeism after taking steps to improve the quality of its office air.

## Practically pretty

Another benefit: Despite all the talk of recycled trash, firms don't need to slum it aesthetically to go green. The 100,000-square-foot Rodale space boasts handsome wood floors made of bamboo, taken from groves that can replenish themselves in just five years. Suben/Dougherty Partnership, which designed the space, notes that hardwood flooring typically comes from trees that may take a century to mature.

For the 1.3 million-square-foot New York Times property and the 40,000-square-foot Wildlife Conservation Society space, interior designers at Fox & Fowle have opted for wood that's certified to have come from nonendangered forests. They have chosen chairs that can be shipped flat and assembled on-site, reducing the amount of disposable packing materials required.

At the Hearst tower, even the three-story stream of water cascading down clear glass blocks in the lobby will play an important environmental role: It is designed to add humidity to an otherwise dry environment, using rainwater from the building's roof. ■

## Caveat designer

**AS CLIENT INTEREST IN** eco-sensitive interior design grows, some manufacturers are rushing to cover conventional products in a **cloak of sustainability.**

"It is getting easier to find green material, but you have to be careful about what you are buying," says Karina Gunsten, an interior designer with the Suben/Dougherty Partnership. "Often, products are not as green as they appear."

**To avoid the "green-washing" trap,** purchasers should look beyond the percentage of recycled material that a product contains to ensure that it wasn't made in a factory with a record of pollution, and doesn't come packed in nonrecyclable materials.

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