

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Vertical city

## At the forefront of the green movement

Dermot Sweeny has been making office buildings environmentally friendly since the mid-1990s

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Dermot Sweeny has been making office buildings environmentally friendly since the mid-1990s, before "greening" became a verb. Fifteen years later, Mr. Sweeny's company has a raft of energy-efficient office buildings under its belt. The latest, at 134 Peter Street, is the city's first to use as simple a concept as windows that open, to flush out and cool an entire building.

Green office space is a reality, he says. But the incentives could be better.

### **What is going on right now in terms of green buildings, green architecture in Toronto?**

Ha. That's a big topic. There's a lot of good things happening, I think. I think generally buildings are getting much better, and there's been renewed interest in doing things that save energy – 'renewed,' meaning the last time we did this was during the oil crisis of the '70s. But, I mean, we've been working on 'green' buildings, I guess, for a long time. And a lot of it came out of not necessarily the pursuit of making things greener or more sustainable, but making them a lot more comfortable.

### **How so?**

In office buildings, specifically, you get a lot of complaints: 'I'm too hot,' 'I'm too cold.' So that was a bit of a red flag to a bull: How do you make it more comfortable? That was in the mid-90s, so 15 years ago. So we set out to try and make buildings more comfortable, but also to come to a better understanding of what we were doing. It led to the early days of repositioning or reinventing the office building. ... A lot of these things we started to study and experiment in, and started to design and respond to, led, also, to reductions in energy.

### **That was almost by accident?**

Not by accident. But once you start questioning things, you know, in a building, it opens Pandora's box, right? You're questioning comfort, you're questioning light levels, you're questioning access to sun. How we build the buildings, how we occupy them.

### **So office buildings, almost by necessity, are at the forefront of the need to reduce your energy footprint?**

Well, yes. They're also the number-one consumer of energy, by far. Office buildings consume a lot more energy than a residential building. They're not even on the same page. And the cooling load is the biggest chunk of that energy consumption. The second largest is light.

**So what's happening right now?**

The other thing that's advanced tremendously is glass. Glass technology is huge. It's gotten so much better in the last five years. What we want is to allow light in and we want to stop heat from coming in. In the old days, you would have to do one thing and counter the other. ... Now, we allow light to come through and we filter heat off. It still needs work. And people are working on it.

**What do you think of the city's Green Standard?**

Green standards are fantastic things. They're great things to do.

**Is this one working?**

Whenever you do something to raise the bar, one of the most important things you need to do is follow up to find out how people are achieving it, or how they are exceeding it. ... You can't say, 'Let's make something green' if it becomes a very difficult competitive disadvantage. Case in point: Toronto has a green standard; Markham doesn't. Companies move to Markham because they can be in cheaper office buildings.

People live in Vaughan because their apartment doesn't have to have a green roof. It's one thing to raise the bar and say, 'We have to be greener.' That's good. But to get us there, we need to share information. ... We've got to start a tremendous network of information-sharing. And I think that's going to be Toronto's challenge.

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