

It all makes eco sense

by Ann Baird

Last issue I described my personal journey to creating and living in “The World’s Greenest Modern House” with my new husband, parents and stepkids. This “greenest house” title was awarded after our home scored very high on six categories for the Living Building Challenge, which is the world’s greenest rating system for buildings.

Here are the categories:

Site: We built our home and vegetable gardens on already-disturbed land.

Water: 90% conservation; rainwater harvesting from living roof, greywater recycling and composting toilets.

Energy: 90% conservation; solar photovoltaic for electrical power (we sell the surplus to B.C. Hydro), solar thermal for hot water.

Beauty & Inspiration: Hundreds of tours, media coverage in *Harrowsmith*, *Sierra Magazine*, on Knowledge Network, at the Royal B.C. Museum, in *The Globe and Mail*, TV interviews and newspaper articles right across Canada.

Health: No toxic materials. The Living Building Challenge has a Red List of toxic materials that *must* be avoided. Even Google has now adopted this list for all of its buildings.

Materials: Zero carbon footprint, 90% sustainable (recycled) wood. Natural paints, earthen floors, natural clay plasters. House is literally made out of clay, sand and straw.



So what do perimenopause and green building have in common?

Ann explores how these two seemingly separate ideas are intimately connected.

One of the motivating factors for us to build our green home was to live in a home free of toxic chemicals. My husband Gord refers to me as the “red-headed, double-breasted canary,” as I am sensitive to chemicals. If I was going to survive my perimenopausal years, I needed to do some serious dot-connecting between my health and the chemical soup I am exposed to.

So now, well into that time of life I lovingly refer to as Hormone Hell, I am learning about how all these chemicals impact a woman’s hormone cycle during perimenopause ... and it isn’t pretty. Some of the materials used to build our homes contain chemicals called endocrine disrupters. In plain terms, this means hormone fuckeruppers. They interfere with the body’s hormones (estrogens, progesterones, testosterone, thyroid hormones, cortisol, etc.) and contribute to stress issues, sleep disorders, neural (brain) dysfunction, loss of sex drive, immune system dysfunction and yes, even cancers. OMG.

We did a really good job building our healthy home ... but wait a second, that’s just one small piece of a healthy environment. The even bigger piece is all the other potentially toxic chemicals that we unknowingly bring into our homes and put on our bodies.

So here’s the nasty fact. Many of the endocrine-disrupting chemicals on the Living Building Challenge’s Materials Red List that have been scientifically proven to affect health (like phthalates) are also present

in our personal care products. The nastiest of all the chemicals are the preservatives and the fragrances.

That’s the bad news. The good news is that these chemicals can be avoided simply by reading labels — so I grab my glasses and my list of 12 toxic chemicals when I go shopping for shampoo, moisturizer and even laundry soap.

Many of us have spent our lives nurturing and protecting our families. Now it’s time to focus on ourselves *and* our families and kick these chemicals right out of our homes, just like many European countries have done.

Come on, Canada ... get with it!

Website:

David Suzuki Foundation and the Dirty Dozen List <http://tinyurl.com/3suv24z>

Books:

Sexy Hormones

by Lorna Vanderhaeghe & Alvin Pettle

There’s Lead in Your Lipstick

by Gillian Deacon

*Ann and her family walk the talk of sustainable living in their multi-generational home, Eco-Sense. Their motto is: **Less life stuff ... More life style!** The Bairds offer tours of their home and provide consulting and educational services in sustainable building. Find out more at www.eco-sense.ca, or email Ann at ann@eco-sense.ca*



Heard about the Energy Diet Challenge?

Ann and Gord Baird are acting as mentors to six Canadian families competing to win a hybrid car by reducing their energy and water consumption this fall. The contest is sponsored by Canadian Geographic and Shell Canada.

Learn more at:

www.energydiet.canadiangeographic.ca

