

# GREEN MYTHS DEBUNKED

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COURTESY OF DILEONARDO

...Or at least vigorously debated. Hospitality designers weigh in on the gap between eco-hype and the reality of what it takes to create and execute earth-friendly projects.

**/ 1 /** DiLeonardo's design for the Westin Kolkata in India shows green can be luxe. The hotel, slated to open in 2012, will feature guest rooms with millwork made from reclaimed woods, along with eco-friendly fabrics, bedding and carpeting.

**///** Leave it to Frank Gehry—perhaps the leading “starchitect” of our time—to diss LEED. In an interview earlier this year with the *Chicago Tribune*, Gehry had this to say about the U.S. Green Building Council's point-based, eco-friendly design specs: “A lot of LEED is given for bogus stuff,” such as the inclusion of on-site bike racks that might never get used.

Not surprisingly, Gehry's comments spawned some serious debate within design circles. Architects and designers around the world are questioning whether LEED, the BRE Environmental Assessment Method and at least a half-dozen other green certification programs are labels that deliver more marketing power than positive environmental impact or

whether they should be lauded for moving the industry's green needle—finally.

LEED may be the hot-button issue, but it's not the only factor in the greenwashing discussion. Does going green cost too much? Do green and luxury mix? Is local sourcing always the most eco-friendly route? Here's what the design community has to say.



BRUCE BUCK, NEW YORK

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COURTESY OF FRCH DESIGN WORLDWIDE

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### LEED Is Overrated

Reactions to this statement range from “definitely” to “yes, but” to “not!” Among those questioning LEED’s value is Eric Corey Freed, a principal at San Francisco-based organicARCHITECT, who says “LEED is only worthwhile if it will help you market the property involved. Otherwise, I think it’s better to spend the money

that would go into completing the paperwork on making the building itself more eco-friendly.”

Taking a more middle-of-the-road view is Jim Stapleton, an architect and vice president at Cincinnati’s FRCH Design Worldwide, who believes that though LEED has been helpful in “raising our awareness of the real issue, which is conservation in all aspects

of our building,” it doesn’t go far enough. “Imagine if we committed to reducing the size of our buildings, rather than just reducing the amount of energy needed to operate some of the oversized structures that are being built now,” Stapleton says. “There aren’t any LEED points given for that, but there should be.”

Among LEED’s staunchest defenders is Clifford Tuttle, a senior vice president at ForrestPerkins, whose professional credentials include LEED AP (Accredited Professional) and membership on a U.S. Green Building Council technical advisory committee that’s helping to create LEED standards specific to the hospitality industry. “That effort involved meeting with leaders from large brands and ownership groups, along with representatives from the USGBC,” says Tuttle, who heads the interior design practice at his firm’s San Francisco office. “From the very beginning, the consensus has been to create

121 At the Nines hotel in Portland, Ore., designers from ForrestPerkins specified a variety of green materials, including casegoods, seating and wall paneling that are low VOC and contain no added urea formaldehyde. This is the living room in one of the suites at the Nines, which is part of Starwood Hotels & Resorts’ Luxury Hotel Collection.

131 Work is slated to start in September on Home2 Suites by Hilton’s extended-stay hotel in Lexington Park, Md. The overall design, including the “Oasis” community room shown here, is by FRCH Design Worldwide and incorporates enough eco-friendly features that the hotel is expected to nab LEED silver certification.



**/ 4 /** Guest rooms at the Home2 Suites by Hilton feature energy-efficient lighting and low-flow bath fixtures.

**/ 5 /** Designers from ForrestPerkins integrated the style of nearby haciendas into the JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa in Texas by using such “eco-luxe” materials as indigenous natural limestone, mesquite, hand-scraped oak and native pecan.

LEED Hospitality standards that are achievable, but also set the bar high enough to be truly meaningful to aiding the environment.”

Tuttle also noted that about 50 hotels have been certified under LEED’s existing standards and that 1,000 more are registered for certification. “I think that latter number is pretty strong evidence that LEED is having a positive impact on the hospitality industry and is not over-rated,” he says.

#### **Going Green Costs Too Much**

The consensus here: While there’s still an up-front cost premium associated with creating eco-friendly hospitality environments, that cost differential is rapidly shrinking—and getting amortized faster than ever. “Green may have been too expensive 10 years ago, when

it was outside the mainstream,” says Lia DiLeonardo, a principal at DiLeonardo, a Warwick, R.I.-based interior architectural design firm. “You really had to search for green product that was applicable for hospitality use, and often the quantity available or timeframe for production made the cost prohibitive for large projects.”

But that’s no longer the case, she says. “The industry has realized the impact green products—and green marketing—can have on the bottom line. As a result, there is now a range to fit every budget.”

ForrestPerkins’ Tuttle goes a step further, asserting that “green is not more expensive. It brings triple benefits to the bottom line, by being socially responsible, environmentally responsible and economically profitable. Those

dollar-and-cents benefits stem from the fact that going green saves money by reducing long-term energy costs as well as water and sewage costs.”

#### **Green and Luxury Don’t Mix**

The jury’s apparently still out on this one, at least in some quarters. OrganicARCHITECT’s Freed, for example, says that some people still believe that green buildings “look like mud huts or rice cakes,” and that green materials are still not high-end enough for luxury hospitality projects.

“I’ve had lots of conversations with hotel executives and designers who’ve said something like, ‘No, no, we’re not interested in green; we’re a high-end boutique firm!’” Freed says. “As if the two were mutually exclusive—they’re not.”

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**/ 6 /** Creating elegant but eco-friendly spaces at the Nines hotel, such as this entry lobby, “took persistence in working with manufacturers,” says ForrestPerkins’ Cliff Tuttle.

**/ 7 /** This Wyndham Hotel, designed by DiLeonardo and slated to open in 2012 in the King Abdullah Financial District in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, will feature energy-efficient lighting, FSC-certified timbers and locally sourced stone.

**/ 8 /** Low-VOC paints, wall coverings and carpeting were used throughout the JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa, including this entrance to its billiards room.

DiLeonardo takes a bigger-picture view, believing that “green luxury can be defined in so many ways: First, it’s a luxury to be able to utilize the most innovative green products on the market, which often come at a premium and are out of reach for the average consumer. Second, some consider it luxurious to be associated with those who can afford to make a positive impact on the environment on a larger scale. And finally, green products themselves can be exquisitely beautiful and unique.”

#### **Local Sourcing Is Always Best**

Another “yes, but” situation. “Local sourcing can help reduce the environmental impact of a project, but sometimes what you need just isn’t available locally,” notes FRCH’s Stapleton. That lack of nearby sources often impacts the choice of carpeting vendors for hospitality projects, says ForrestPerkins’ Tuttle. “Most carpeting made in the U.S. comes from the Southeast, which means you’d





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be hard-pressed to find carpeting manufactured locally for every project location,” he says.

In addition, Tuttle says designers must consider the economics of local purchases. “A local millwork shop may be more economical to use for built-in cabinetry and specialty millwork as well as doors,” he explains. “However they may not be geared for making casegoods and seating like a domestic or even Asian manufacturer who can produce goods more efficiently and economically, inclusive of freight.”

Moreover, Tuttle believes the social aspects of local sourcing need to be considered early on in the design process. “By working with a local art consultant, the design will be successful in infusing the hotel with an array of artwork to provide the property with connection to the community,” he says.

DiLeonardo also favors a holistic approach to local sourcing. “Rather than looking at design first

and sourcing and substituting local product after the fact, research needs to be done up front,” she says. “This allows the design to take advantage of the most appropriate items for local sourcing and the designer to make decisions that refrain from using items that carry a heavy burden from an environmental standpoint.”

The myths explored above are not the only green-related points of contention swirling around hospitality design circles, of course. Want to raise a ruckus at your office? Try asking one of these questions: Do guests really care whether they’re staying in an eco-friendly hotel? Are green products are less durable than their conventional counterparts?

Chances are, you won’t find any clear-cut, black-and-white answers to such queries. That’s right—when deciding whether to go green, designers often find themselves wrestling with shades of gray. **HS**



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