

# NEW HOMES

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## Healthy housing

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### Unique designs begin with the building site

How would you like to live in a house that not only saves you money, but that is healthier for you, too?

That is the idea behind Martin Liefhebber's company Breathe Architects, Inc. of Toronto. Liefhebber, who will be speaking in Edmonton on Tuesday, caters to progressive clients who want a house that is not only good to the environment, but is also good for them.

Breathe Architects brings together expertise from various architectural and engineering disciplines to "develop affordable and environmentally friendly manifestations." Their designs are unique in the landscape of developer-built housing.

Unlike most tract housing, many ideas for Liefhebber's designs actually come from the site the house or building will be built on. Take the Wilson house, for example, in Mono Mills, just northeast of Orangeville, Ont. Owned by John Wilson and his wife Leigh Geraghty, the house has a unique form. It is orientated on the site in such a manner that it maximizes the passive solar energy from the sun, and makes use of natural ventilation.

In fact, John Wilson wrote about the design and construction of his house in a book called *Natural Living*.

"In addition to their low annual operation costs, our clients benefit from the health and well-being of living in the dwellings we design," Liefhebber states.

Most houses he has designed use alternative energy like solar power from photovoltaics or wind turbines. In many cases, they allow the house to give power back to the grid, meaning a credit will

appear on the monthly utility bill.

The innovations used in the Wilson house resulted in an award from the National Post/Design Exchange for sustainability.

"We eliminate reliance on fossil fuels, seek to use renewable resources, and source manufacturers whose products do not reduce the value of the environment or negatively affect clients' health," says Liefhebber. "We encourage life-cycle thinking and like to embody waste and recyclable products as building materials."

Joan Maisonneuve, of Due North Conservation in Edmonton, says the most talked about thing is preserved wood. "There's been a concern about the chemicals used in preserved wood," as they are toxic and hazardous if consumed. This leads to concerns about using old railway ties or even pressure-treated wood in gardens or play areas and parks for children.

The Straw Bale Co-Housing residence in Mississauga is also innovative in its program and construction. It provides four dwelling units for families that share some common living spaces.

Not only did this house use land very efficiently, it also created an environment with the best indoor air quality possible. Breathe architects also designed the solar power system that was "seamlessly integrated into the standing seam metal roof."

Solar power supplied one-third of the house's electricity. The design is elegant and when seen from the street, no one would be able to distinguish that its walls were made of straw bales!

The Toronto Healthy House in the

Riverdale neighbourhood was a project commissioned by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to demonstrate the viability of sustainable living. More than 30,000 Canadians have visited the house to date. It was even featured on a postal stamp.

For a look at the house, go online to see <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/pop-up/hhtoronto/> or Liefhebber's site at [www.breathebyassociation.com](http://www.breathebyassociation.com).

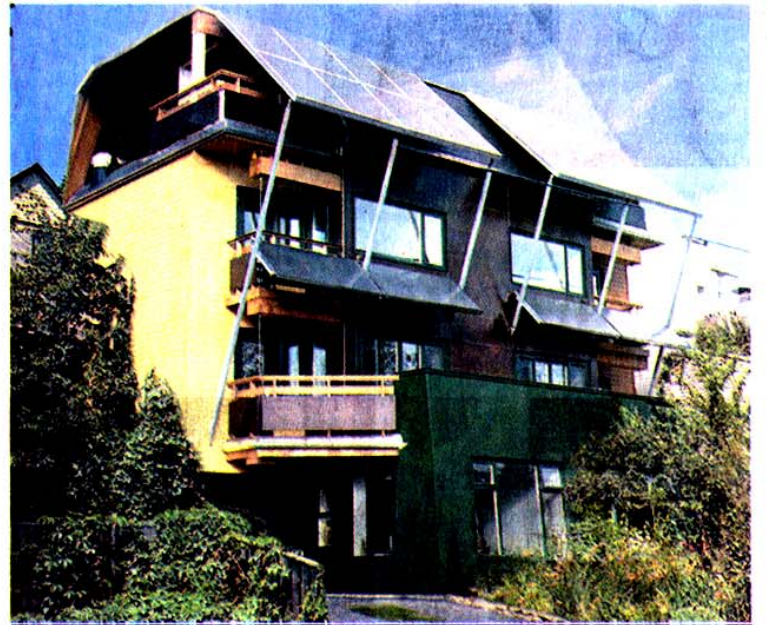
The house lives up to its high acclaim. Its total utility bill for the year is \$80, rather than \$800 for a similar size of house in the same neighbourhood. It only uses 120 litres of water annually, due to grey water recycling and rain water collection.

The days of high utility bills are over. Now's the time to subscribe to the ideas of healthy and sustainable housing.

Locally, architect Ron Wickman has put some of the principles to work in his own home in the city's south side (New Homes, Nov. 22, 2003). Wickman's house has such features as a sun room for passive solar heating, heat recovery ventilators and sustainable materials. Edmonton senior Eric Steeden's house installed solar panels on a trellis in his garden and it now powers half of his 1949 bungalow.

For homeowners interested in touring solar-powered houses around Edmonton, mark this date on your calendar: June 12, 2004. For more information, see [www.ecosolar.ca](http://www.ecosolar.ca).

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Liefhebber's demonstration Healthy House in Toronto

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A straw-bale multi-family house providing the excellent indoor air quality and a non-toxic environment — with not a bale in sight.

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### WORDS TO LIVE BY

► Martin Liefhebber will be giving a lecture on The Architecture of Healthy Housing as part of the M.A.D.E./Works lecture series at 7 p.m. on Tuesday. The lecture will be held at Grant MacEwan College, city centre campus, conference theatre 5-142. Tickets are \$7 and are available at the door. For more information, see [www.madeinedmonton.org](http://www.madeinedmonton.org) or call 288-5575.



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Who needs high energy bills? The Wilson house uses the power of the sun, wind and rain and innovative technologies based on natural sources.