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## Earth Day is coming: Should you buy in a green building this year?

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APRIL 21, 2016 - 8:59AM

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New green buildings seem to be popping up every day in NYC, but how exactly do they differ from conventional structures? And should you buy into one? Let FirstService Realty's Lindsay Wirt, Platinum Properties' Cash Bernard, Citi Habitats' Santiago Steele and real estate developer Michael Namer of Alfa Development be your guides to all things green in this week's Earth Day edition of [Buy Curious](#).

### **THE WISH LIST:**

What are the differences between all these "green" certified buildings? And what should I know about buying in a green building?

### **THE REALITY:**

These days, it seems like every building in NYC is a going green. But while eco-friendly elements such as energy-efficient windows and air filtration systems can simply be another level of amenities a developer can add in (a la fitness rooms or pet spas), green projects are actually about a lot more than that, says Namer, whose Alfa Development has built Earth-friendly

buildings like Village Green West in Chelsea and 199 Mott Street in Nolita. “We’re not doing it because we’re trying to sell apartments, but because we’re committed to building in that fashion.”

Still, he acknowledges that even if would-be apartment buyers say that they want to do their all to save the planet, they’re also looking for the best product they can find, with aesthetically pleasing, high-end features and “tons of amenities,” he says. To attract buyers, a green building has to have all that and more.

But before you sign on for green living, here are a handful of questions to ask:

### **What are the different types of green buildings?**

- **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED):** Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, this is probably the most well-known green building certification. Simply put, “LEED building certifications are a checklist of criteria that rank how energy-efficient buildings are,” says FirstService Realty’s Wirt. The process utilizes a point system to discern the environmental merits of a given building. There are four different levels: certified, silver, gold, and platinum. “The actual certification given is determined based on a number of points accumulated in several different categories such as energy usage, water usage, materials used, etc.,” says Platinum Properties’ Bernard.

But what do these rankings really mean? Not much, some say. This [2011 study of 953 New York City office buildings](#) found that 21 LEED-certified and LEED-silver buildings surprisingly showed *zero* energy savings when compared with non-LEED buildings (although LEED-gold buildings “outperformed other NYC office buildings by 20 percent”).

*Forbes* echoed that finding, noting that LEED-certified homes are actually often *less* energy-efficient than uncertified ones since, according to them, applicants are granted LEED status “merely by offering computer models that project the building will meet a certain threshold.” After that initial certification, the building doesn’t have to follow through with any of its plans. “It’s like telling your parents you’ll take care of the house while they’re away and then throwing a huge party, except in this case your parents never return to see the damage,” according to the magazine.

- **Passive houses:** “This is essentially a very well-insulated building that is airtight and uses 90 percent less energy to both heat and cool it,” explains Wirt. Elements of certified passive houses include triple-glazed windows and super-insulation. ([For more information on passive houses, read our primer.](#))

### **Can you name some features of green buildings?**

According to our experts, here are some of the most common:

- Sustainable buildings materials such as bamboo or cork floors

- Low-VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) paints (since VOCs have been found to [contribute to smog formation and have been linked to respiratory illnesses](#))
- Energy Star appliances
- Low-flow bathroom equipment, including toilets and showerheads
- Energy-efficient HVAC systems
- Recycled carpeting
- Energy-efficient windows
- Solar hot water heaters

### What are some pros of living in a green building?

- Lower energy bills since the appliances will use less energy. According to the [U.S. Green Building Council](#), the average household spends about \$2,150 a year on residential energy bills. However, LEED-certified homes use roughly 30 to 60 percent less energy than non-green homes, which can cut energy bills by 20 percent for savings between \$200 and \$400 a year. Citi Habitats' Steele recommends [this article](#) to help you determine exactly how much a new appliance will save you.
- Indoor air quality will be better since better ventilation systems let more fresh air into the building.
- The satisfaction of knowing that you're doing your part to save the world. "Who wouldn't want to live in a healthier environment while helping Mother Earth remain the beautiful planet she is," says Bernard. In fact, Namer points out that almost 50 percent of greenhouse gases are from residential buildings. "Anything you're doing to reduce that is great."

### What are some cons?

- "You will be held to an extremely high standard of recycling in the building," says Wirt, noting that residents of eco-friendly buildings will be urged to reduce, reuse and recycle at every turn. "When you live in a green building there is a certain expectation for the residents to recycle," she says, citing [303 East 33rd](#), a LEED-gold condo building in Kips Bay, as an example. "They have recycling on every floor and lots of signage encouraging residents to recycle," she says. Of course, at the end of the day what you choose to do is up to you. After all, "there's no green police," says Steele. Just know that in a green building, building management (and other residents) probably will be watching. So be sure to separate your paper from your plastic at any and every opportunity.
- Units in green buildings are "typically more expensive than ones in a traditional building," says Wirt, but according to a [Curbed.com](#) study, "they cost only fractionally more." Plus, you'll make some of it back with decreased energy bills.

*Check out these green apartments:*

[Kips Bay one-bedroom, one-bathroom condo \\$1.595 million](#): Located in one of the first LEED-certified condo buildings in NYC, this apartment at 303 East 33rd Street between First and

Second Avenues features an open kitchen with glass cabinets, glass countertops, and a glass backsplash; high ceilings; custom closets; in-unit laundry; and bamboo floors throughout. Building amenities include a landscaped roof deck, a bocce court, a media lounge, a game room, a fitness center with a yoga studio, bike storage and parking.



**East Village two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom condo, \$4.995 million:** This triplex at 311 East 11th Street between First and Second avenues is located in Village Green, the first LEED-gold-certified building in the East Village. The upper level of the unit offers large living and dining spaces, an open kitchen, and a powder room. The bedrooms on the floor below have ensuite baths with heated floors and deep soaking tubs. The third level has a bar and a solarium, and overlooks a 2,000-square-foot private roof deck. The condo building offers a 24-hour attended lobby, a gym, a lounge, and bike storage.

**Battery Park City two-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom condo, \$2.195 million:** Located in the Millennium Tower, a LEED-gold-certified building at 30 West Street between First Place and Second Place, this high-floor corner unit features nine-foot ceilings, wrap-around floor-to-ceiling windows, a large living room, a chef's kitchen with a Viking range and Subzero refrigerator, a master bedroom with two walk-in closets, and cherry wood flooring throughout. Green elements of the building include an air filtration system to provide cleaner air in the apartments, plus a solar rooftop.



[Greenwich Village three-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bathroom condo, \\$8.95 million](#): Eco-friendly features of this condo conversion at 66 East 11th Street between Broadway and University Place include building-wide purified air and water. A keyed elevator opens directly into this floor-through unit, which offers open kitchen, living and dining areas. There are also three south-facing bedrooms and a top-of-the-line kitchen with a six-burner Viking range.