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A Case For Green Roofs

Green roofs are easy on the eyes and energy costs

By Robert Kravitz

The popularity of what are known as Green roofs continues to grow throughout North America. Although common in Europe where as many as one in 10 buildings in some countries there have a Green roof, they are just recently becoming a more familiar sight at hotels and other buildings in North American cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, Toronto, Vancouver, BC, and Portland, OR.

And faced with rising energy costs and the desire for higher performance, many North American buildings—including such hotels as the Fairmount Waterfront Hotel and Coast Plaza Hotel in Vancouver—are opting for more advanced Green technology, including Green roofs.

"It has taken time for facility owners, developers and architects to fully understand Green roofing systems and their benefits," says Sandra McCullough, a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) accredited professional with Weston Solutions Inc., Westchester, PA. "But as they become more familiar with the systems—and their benefits—interest has grown significantly."



With a Green roof system, the roof stays at a more moderate temperature, about 60 to 80 degrees during the heat of the summer and at a more constant temperature in the winter.

WHAT' S A GREEN ROOF?

Before discussing the features and benefits, it is important to have a clear understanding of what exactly constitutes a Green roof. A Green roof involves the placement of low-maintenance, hearty plants, such as sedum, along with grasses and other smaller plant species on top of an existing roof membrane.

There are two types of Green roofs: intensive and extensive:

- Intensive Green roofs are characterized by thick soil depths (eight inches to more than four feet) with elaborate plantings that include shrubs and trees. These park-like Green roofs are very heavy and require considerable maintenance to sustain their aesthetic appearance.
- Extensive Green roofs, on the other hand, are much lighter in weight with soil depths ranging from three to seven inches. The soil may be specially formulated to help absorb and retain water in a controlled manner to nourish plant life.

Due to the shallow soils and the extreme environment on many roofs, the plants selected for an extensive Green roof are typically low growing ground cover that are extremely sun-, weather-and drought-tolerant. The plant life may also be customized to meet specific individual and climate applications. And unlike intensive Green roofs, extensive Green roofing systems tend to require relatively little maintenance.

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Although extensive Green roofs can be installed directly over most roofs with little concern about the weight, Mc-Cullough advises that a structural engineer be brought in to inspect the structure and determine weight load capacities and limitations.

One of the most attractive benefits of a Green roof is the fact that it can double the life span of the present roof, a considerable savings, especially for a large facility. This savings occurs because in the heat of summer, a roof can reach temperatures well above 170 degrees Fahrenheit. In the cold of winter, it can drop to freezing, even subzero, temperatures. These extremes in temperature cause the roof to expand and contract—one of the major factors in a roof's deterioration. With a Green roof system, the roof stays at a more moderate temperature, about 60 to 80 degrees during the heat of the summer and at a more constant temperature in the winter, (actual temperature depends on location). This consistency in temperature helps protect the roof. Additionally, with a Green roof installed, the present roof is not exposed to harmful ultraviolet rays, which also extends its lifecycle.

Along with these benefits, Green roofs can:

- Save significantly on heating and cooling costs
- Insulate for sound, especially for floors directly under the Green roof
- Significantly reduce storm water runoff, which helps lower plumbing and construction costs as well, and provide water filtration
- Improve air quality as the plants absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen
- Reduce the urban heat island effect
- Provide aesthetic amenities for tenants and neighbors.

As mentioned above, a major advantage of Green Roofing systems that hotels and other facilities can enjoy is energy savings. "Just as they help 'quiet' facilities, Green roofs add additional insulation properties, which help reduce heating and cooling costs," says McCullough. "Some facilities have found that the energy savings alone can help pay for the Green roof in just a few years."

Extended Stay Gets Hip

Starwood is at it again—looking to gain the upper hand, this time in the extended stay segment. And, like just about everything it does, from non-smoking hotels to sensual scented lobbies, it's aim is to be cutting edge.

Inspired by Westin Hotels, the new upper upscale extended stay brand, code named "Project ESW," will feature "a sophisticated, residential product designed to be a refreshing haven in a space rendered rote with look-alike brands and generic features," says the company. Starwood debuted the yet-to-be-named brand to hotel developers at last month's New York University International Hospitality Conference.

"Project ESW" will feature signature Westin elements like the Heavenly Bed, Heavenly Bath and Westin Workout powered by Reebok, as well as new products designed with the long-term guest in mind. Instead of working with traditional hotel designers, Westin has partnered with Costas Kondylis, a Manhattan-based residential architect and interior design firm AvroKO, considered innovators in creating smart space living.

The concept, which will consist exclusively of new-build properties, will feature clean, contemporary, urban-inspired studios and one-bedroom suites. Highlights include: large kitchens featuring sleek design and stainless steel appliances, custom-designed closets and built-ins, in-room offices, gourmet pantries with upscale dinner selections, local wines and micro-brews and a variety of healthy food and beverage options; and landscaped terraces and pool areas designed for socializing.



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These artist renderings detail Starwood's Project ESW.

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