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[ ONLY 11 LEED-CERTIFIED PROPERTIES, BUT MORE TO COME ]

## Upscale hotels take the LEED in design

By Jeri Clausing

AVON, Colo. — From the street, the Westin Riverfront Resort and Spa being developed near Colorado's tony Beaver Creek ski area looks like just another of the many new hotels and condominium projects cropping up in the Colorado mountains.

But this is not just another hotel. If the developers get it right, the resort is likely to become the first luxury property in Colorado with LEED certification, meaning it has met the green building standards for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design set by the U.S. Green Building Council.

From roofing tiles made from recycled

tires to nontoxic glues, paints and textiles, every aspect of the building is analyzed for minimal environmental impact and LEED points, the total of which will determine

whether it will attain certification and at what level.

To date, only 11 hotels in the world have won the council's LEED certification, and only two have achieved gold status: the Gaia in Napa Valley, Calif., and the Len Foote Hike Inn in Dawsonville, Ga.

At least two new hotels, the Proximity in Greensboro, N.C., and Teton Creek Resort Hotel and Conference Center in Driggs, Idaho, are vying to be the first to achieve platinum certification, the top level.

Another 187 hotel projects have registered their intent to seek what has become the green equivalent of the Good Housekeeping

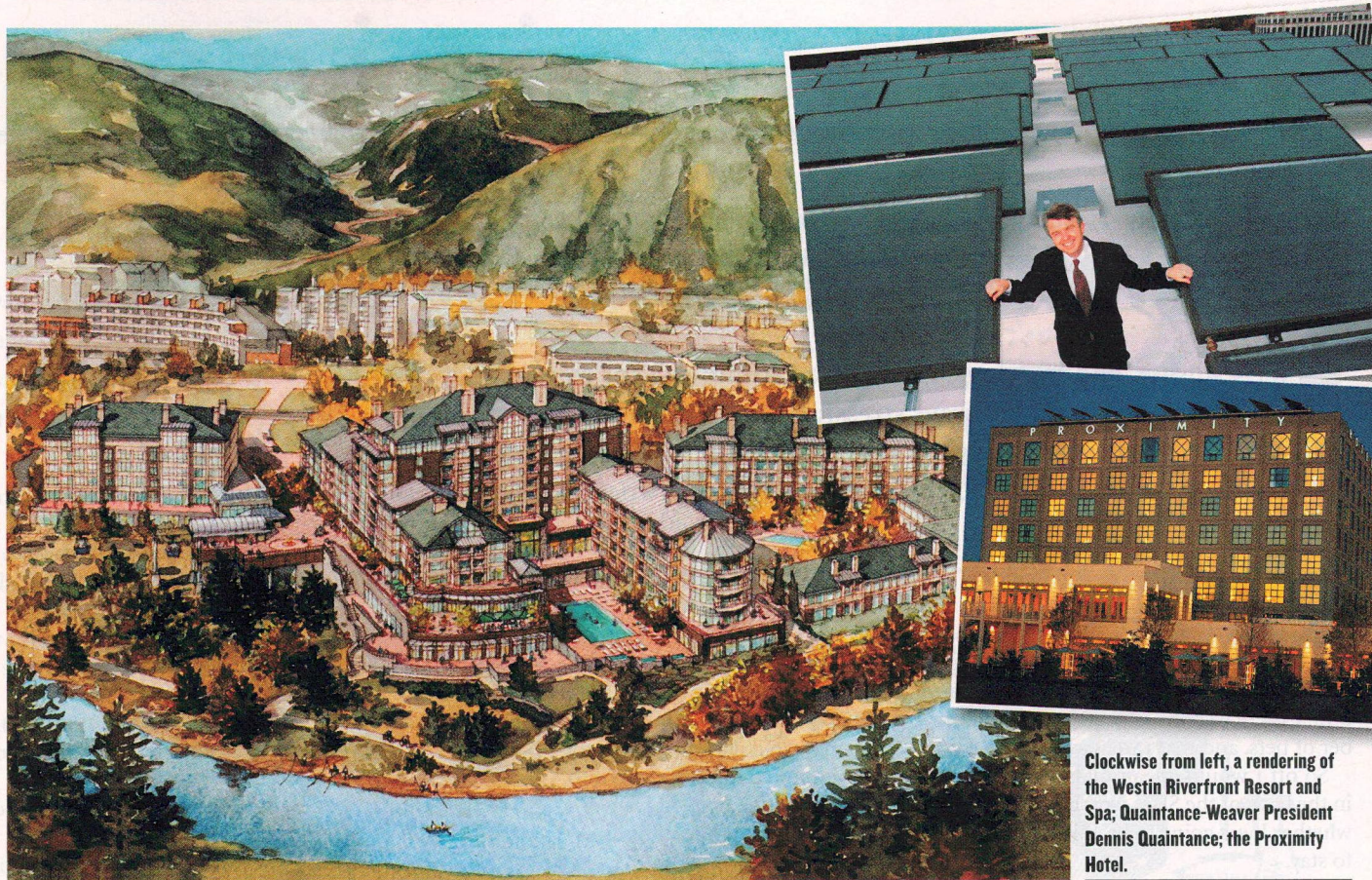
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Clockwise from left, a rendering of the Westin Riverfront Resort and Spa; Quaintance-Weaver President Dennis Quaintance; the Proximity Hotel.

## LEED

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Seal of approval for the construction industry. And that number is expected to continue growing.

"Just based on the number of projects that we have seen register in the last couple of months, I bet it will double in the next six to eight months," said Ashley Katz, a spokeswoman for the Green Building Council, a nonprofit established in Washington in 1993 to advance green and healthy building practices.

The group's third-party LEED certification has become the de facto standard for environmentally friendly construction.

Starwood recently announced that all of its new Element brand hotels will be LEED certified. And Barry Sternlicht's new 1 brand hotels will all be built to LEED specifications.

The LEED certification is based on a points system that looks at five areas of environmental performance: the building site; water efficiency; the materials and resources used; energy and atmosphere; and indoor environmental quality. There are separate standards for newbuilds and existing buildings.

For new buildings, Robert Trotter, general manager for the Westin resort being developed by East West Partners, said it's a process that must be considered at every level of construction, because it involves everything from the use of recycled materials to recycling of construction waste to how rainwater runoff is diverted when the project is complete.

For instance, the Westin site sits along the Eagle River. The resort has cleaned up the scrub between the resort and the river and is creating a 5-acre park that will be donated to the city.

"I don't know if we get LEED points for that, but it's the right thing to do," he said.

However, the resort will get points for having runoff from its decks go into the park wetlands rather than the wastewater system.

Energy efficiency, obviously, is a key factor in any green operation. So the resort was designed for maximum exposure to the sun and is built with lots of big windows to reduce reliance on artificial light.

But it's not just the energy efficiency of the building that is considered. The energy expended in constructing the building also counts, so the Westin paid extra to have its sheetrock delivered directly to the site. Otherwise it would have been delivered down the mountains from Gypsum, Colo., to the distributor in Denver and then to Avon.

"It's those kinds of things that actually get points for LEED," Trotter said.

Inside the rooms, all the appliances are Energy Star rated. And all the materials, from grout to paint and glue and carpet, are low in toxins.

**'One philosophy is that process is more important than outcome.' — Dennis Quaintance, president, Quaintance-Weaver**

The Green Building Council estimated building to LEED specifications added about 1% to 2% to building costs, a number that goes up when projects try for the higher silver, gold and platinum levels.

Additionally, Gary Golla of Sera Architects in Portland, Ore., said the paperwork for LEED certification runs about \$80,000 to \$100,000 for a 300-room hotel.

"In the long run, fees that you pay for LEED [paperwork] can pay back pretty early, probably in two to three years," he said.

"And you have to think about the longer-term payback. We are finding on one of our larger projects you can save about \$1 million over 10 years just in energy costs."

At the 172-room Proximity Hotel, which opened in October, owner Dennis Quaintance estimated that going for platinum LEED status added about 7% to the hotel's \$28 million construction cost.

Proximity features include North America's first installation of the regenerative

drive for Otis Elevators' Gen2 elevator, which reduces net energy usage by capturing the system's energy and feeding it back into the building's internal electrical grid. In addition, 100 solar panels on the roof generate energy to heat water.

Quaintance, president of Quaintance-Weaver, said one reason his company was willing to pay the extra costs was that it intended to own the hotel for the long run and would therefore recoup the long-term savings.

And while he now calculates the hotel has two more than the 52 points it needs for platinum certification, he said the original goal was not to capture the top award.

"Our philosophy about things such as this is that process is more important than outcome," he said. "We're idealistic, but we're not crazy. We really just onesy-twosied this."

"Usually you ask, 'What is the cost, is it durable and what does it look like?'" he said about the material selection process. "We just added, 'Is there a sustainable angle?' ... We just said we are going to ask that question and we are going to have the energy to go deep."

The Westin and the Proximity were the first LEED projects for both Trotter and Quaintance.

Asked about his biggest challenges, Trotter said, "It's not been so much of a challenge as it's been fun. Some of the big stuff is easy ... but we're still looking for the appropriate recycle bin for the room. Trying to figure out some of the small stuff has been harder than picking out the right boards."

Most importantly, however, he said he has discovered "you don't have to sacrifice one ounce of luxury and you can still be green."

Quaintance agreed.

"I can't say it was easy, but it was doable. There is no way you will notice you are using less water, less energy; because this is a luxury hotel. If we were able to accomplish this in luxury, imagine what you could do with a budget property."