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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Handout Photos, Canwest News Service / TheCanühome is built as an open, wood grid, something like the supporting ribs of a wooden ship, containing a kitchen, living room, dining room, bathroom and bedroom. Although the home is not for sale now, interior features -- including countertops and benches in the 350-square-foot demo house -- can be bought and adapted to meet consumers' needs. ;

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Would-be buyers wild about sustainable home; It's just an exhibit, with a lesson about energy efficiency

Eager consumers wanted to buy -- not just look at -- an innovative demonstration house that showcased the latest Canadian technologies promoting sustainable living that was on display in Toronto recently.

Officials were surprised by the enthusiasm of 13,000 visitors checking out the one-storey green house and taking in sustainable living lessons offered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., George Brown College, the Forest Stewardship Council and TD Canada Trust.

"The exhibit was intended to communicate to consumers how they can improve their energy efficiency, save on their utility bills and improve the indoor quality of their own homes," says Mark Salerno, Toronto's district manager for CMHC. "When people saw it, they were asking, 'Where can I buy this?' "

Although the Canühome was not for sale, Salerno says interior features, including countertops and benches in the 350-square-foot demo house, can be bought and adapted to meet consumers' needs.

Canühome's mission is to educate consumers about sustainable living and making smart buying decisions. It is so far scheduled to appear at three shows in Toronto, although CMHC is hoping to take it across the country at some point.

The Canühome is built as an open, wood grid, something like the supporting ribs of a wooden ship, containing a kitchen, living room, dining room, bathroom and bedroom. The structure is filled with the latest in sustainable housing, including interpretive panels for visitors on the impact housing has on the environment and what everyone can do to improve their quality of living -- both indoors and outdoors.

"Canühome is a single-family living unit that conveys in a very clear, tangible and compelling way how Canadians can make changes in their home through their behaviours in terms of purchasing decisions

that ultimately improve their indoor air quality, energy efficiency and, by extension, improve the environment," Salerno says.

The design and construction promotes sustainability. The materials and technology all reflect CMHC's Healthy Housing and FlexHousing features as well as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, standards. The wood products are renewable and responsible, certified to meet Forest Stewardship Council standards. All the products used in the model demonstrate how day-to-day sustainability can be achieved inside the home through the use of certified paper products, non-toxic household cleaners and energy-reducing appliances.

The demo house is also showing the housing industry that building sustainable housing and incorporating some of Canühome 's features makes good business sense because they appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

"It's the chain of supply and demand," Salerno says. "We're creating awareness, which leads to demand, and that demand enables the development market to invest and supply this because they're responding to an actual need."

TD Canada Trust is also responding to consumer demand with its Green Mortgage and Green Home Equity Line of Credit. The financial institution provides an interest rate discount of one per cent off the posted interest rate on a five-year fixed mortgage. TD Canada Trust will rebate up to one per cent of the amount of the mortgage or the fixed rate portion when homebuyers make Energy Star-qualified purchases.

"We're always trying to look at ways to improve housing because housing is where Canadians spend most of their time," Salerno says. "Canada has always been a leader in terms of quality of housing, and this is simply an effort to ensure that we keep that standing."