

New inn's owners going for 'deep green'

Building intended as showplace for environmentally friendly design

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When the owners of Baltimore's Black Olive restaurant began formulating plans to build an inn one block away, the word "green" still referred to a color more than an environmental movement.

But in the 10 years that the project has been under development, builders have learned plenty about "eco-friendly" design, including which green features are mostly marketing gimmicks and which really can have a lasting impact.

When it opens next year, the \$6 million Inn at the Black Olive won't be the first local hotel and marketplace with a green roof or bamboo woodwork. But it is shaping up to be one of the region's most environmentally responsible projects, because the owners have set out to make it a showplace for the latest ideas in "deep green" architecture.

Dimitris Spiliadis, a partner and self-professed "green guru" of the family that is building the inn, said he wants it to be an example of all that can be done to create environmentally responsible buildings today. He said he prefers the term "high performance" to "green," a word he believes has become overused and imprecise when applied to building projects.

To make their point, the development team is holding a news conference and tour starting at noon today to provide information about the opening and to show off some of its features. Visitors will learn about the geothermal well system that will be used to heat the building, "aerated" concrete walls that will support it and the "green roof" that will help reduce rainwater runoff.

"We don't want to keep this to ourselves," Dimitris Spiliadis said. "We want it to be a model for others."

The project is scheduled to open around March 1 at 803 S. Caroline St. in East Baltimore. The development team is the Spiliadis family, including Dimitris and his parents, Stelios and Pauline, owners of the Black Olive restaurant at 814 S. Bond St. Designed by architect Stuart Macklin, the new building will contain a gourmet market with a bakery, fish market and wine shop, 12 upscale guest suites (each named after a different Greek grape), and a rooftop wine bar and banquet facility called the Olive Room.

The development team was selected in 1999 by the city of Baltimore, which owned the land and sought proposals that year. Formerly a gas station, the property sits across from the former AlliedSignal parcel, which was contaminated with chromium but has been capped and is now being marketed as a mixed-use community called Harbor Point. The inn will be a slipcover of sorts for a municipal garage that opened several years ago. The guest suites will all face westward, toward the Inner Harbor.



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Dimitris Spiliadis said he intends to seek platinum-level certification for Leadership in Environmental Engineering and Design (LEED) from the U.S. Green Building Council, which would make the inn one of the first in Maryland with such recognition. He said his family is aiming to appeal to "eco-conscious" travelers, international travelers who are visiting Johns Hopkins Hospital, and patrons of the Black Olive, among others. One of their models is the Inn at Little Washington in Washington, Va.

Dimitris Spiliadis said he always wanted the inn to be environmentally sensitive. But over the years, he said, as the market for green building products and techniques became more sophisticated, he was able to identify more ways to make it sustainable.

Stelios Spiliadis said it was difficult at first to convince contractors and lenders that it was worth taking extra steps to include these features, which can add to a building's initial cost. He said the resistance led to delays in the project, which was originally expected to open in 2004, and at least one contractor backed out. But the project finally received financial support in the form of a low-interest loan from Maryland's energy administration. The developers are using experts such as Green Tech Contracting and green roof pioneer Ed Snodgrass.

Dimitris Spiliadis said he and his parents are eager to show off the inn because they hope others will use some of the ideas they've used to build it.

"We don't want to be an island of green," he said. "We want to be a sea of green."

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