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Green is good

Ahead of the Green Building Forum in Bahrain this month, HEIDI DEMUYNCK makes a case for Leed certification



Demuyneck: Leed is not all or nothing

Introduced in 1998, Leed (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), is a building rating system developed by the US Green Building Council (USGBC) which outlines standards required for environmentally sustainable design, construction and operation of buildings and neighborhoods. Leed has grown to encompass more than 14,000 projects in over 30 countries. The rating system has transformed the building market by both recognising the need for environmental stewardship within the industry and raising consumer awareness of green building benefits.

Summertown Interiors' corporate headquarters and showroom in Dubai's Jebel Ali Free Zone are the first Leed-certified interiors within the UAE. Summertown Interiors' premises have used water-efficient fixtures to reduce water consumption by more than 32 per cent, and building lighting energy has been reduced by about 54.98 per cent. Summertown has adopted Leed as an opportunity to lead by example.

Considering that buildings account for approximately 40 per cent of the consumption of raw materials and energy, the building and interiors sector play an integral role in contributing to environmental sustainability. To deliver solutions within budgets to companies looking to convert their offices into such Leed-compliant facilities, it is necessary to abide by a number of requirements.

Nevertheless, there are several levels of environmental sustainability that a company can employ in its offices and it need not be an 'all or nothing' mentality; Leed's comprehensive system of standards for design act as constructive guidelines for companies seeking this kind of green solution.

An innovative design process is a key consideration of the Leed rating system, enabling designers to work with the client on developing unique design concepts to create the perfect interior space.

Aesthetics and state-of-the-art design have become the driving force behind Summertown's Gold certification, in addition to employing a work space that is energy efficient, environment friendly, and cost effective. Other considerations include sustainable sites, water efficiency, optimise energy performance, minimise energy use, usage of materials with recycled content, waste management, and indoor environmental quality.

In such a fragile economic climate, businesses on any level are thinking with regard to secure long-term return, and as environmental sustainability decreases operating expenses, in addition to a multitude of other economic benefits, corporate social responsibility and the green solution are gaining a foothold here in the region.

Here in the UAE, the urgency of implementing an eco-conscious policy has been propelled by environmental awareness campaigns such as projects undertaken by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and his implementation of green building specifications and standards for all new buildings being built here.

The increasing emphasis on "green rating" systems for buildings and interiors, initiated by both the government and companies here in the UAE, gives testimony to the development of working spaces like that of Summertown Interiors that maintain the functionality aspect without compromising on the look and feel of the office.

Prior to her current position as sales director, Summertown Interiors, Heidi Demuyneck worked in Belgium as a furniture designer and in the UAE as an interior designer. A graduate of the Royal Art School of Antwerp, she has 20 years project experience with clients such as Barclays, Credit Agricole Indosuez (Abu Dhabi and Dubai), HH The Presidents Office at Al Babr Palace, Merrill Lynch, Adnoc, SMBC bank, DGCX and Xerox.