

## The agent from G.r.e.e.n.

Kathy Bergquist is part of a new vanguard, only selling homes that are kind to the environment

**Patrick Langston**

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Orléans-based real estate representative Kathy Bergquist is, according to her manager, off to the slowest start of any new agent he's ever known.

Yet neither of them questions her decision to sell only green residential real estate.

Bergquist, a member of the EXIT Realty Matrix Brokerage team, became a licensed agent in September. Rather than hustling houses, she's been laying the groundwork -- fostering relationships with eco-friendly designers and builders, researching materials and suppliers, building a resource-rich website ([movingtogreen.ca](http://movingtogreen.ca)) -- that will make her niche service credible and sustainable.

"There are 2,300 agents in Ottawa covering ordinary real estate," says Bergquist. "Green has always been part of how I do and view things, and I got into this because I thought there was something missing in real estate here."

According to a recently released report by Royal LePage/National Association of Green Agents and Brokers (NAGAB), she's on to something. The report found that 72 per cent of Canadians plan to make their next home purchase a green-improved one. Of those, 62 per cent said they would pay \$5,000 to \$20,000 more for green features. Another eight per cent would be willing to fork out more than \$20,000.

Across Ottawa, a growing number of large and custom home builders have adopted green standards, designing and constructing Energy 2000 homes that cut bills.

Energy efficiency and indoor air quality top green buyers' wish lists, says Bergquist. That means high-efficiency furnaces, good ventilation to keep air fresh and mould away, and building materials that do not off-gas harmful substances.

She takes green several steps further, even giving a fresh spin to the old real estate mantra of location,

location, location.

"What can you walk to? How accessible is this place for everyday items?" she asks. "I'm



CREDIT: Pat McGrath, The Ottawa Citizen  
Real estate agent Kathy Bergquist says energy efficiency and indoor air quality top green buyers' wish lists, along with high-efficiency furnaces, good ventilation and building materials that do not off-gas harmful substances.

trying to move to community well-being by emphasizing living close to where you actually spend your time, where you play and work. You're not only saving energy, you're building community."

Bergquist, whose own home near Bank Street and Heron Road is about 1,700 square feet, challenges the mega-house.

"Why do you need 2,500 square feet? Some people do, but a lot have houses much bigger than they need. If you have six bathrooms, then I don't care if you have low-flush toilets; it's not a water-efficient house."

Her website digs deeper yet, praising green features, like solar hot water heaters, deciduous trees that keep the house cool in summer, and drought- and pest-resistant ground covers.

None of which makes Bergquist a green fanatic.

"Our family drives places; we're not purists or anything. You don't have to go the whole hog or be a militant

environmentalist for me to work with you."

Halyna Tataryn, a Calgary green real estate agent since 2004, concurs. Sustainable residential properties, mostly pre-owned and new inner city homes, including infill projects, comprise 80 per cent of her business. Young, well-heeled professionals figure prominently among her clients.

"It's becoming more of a norm. It's not mainstream, but it's definitely moving there," she says. While not always the most profitable area of real estate, she adds, "It's where my values lie."

Tataryn holds an EcoBroker designation from the United States-based EcoBroker International, a professional training and certification organization specializing in sustainable real estate. In Canada, the Toronto-based NAGAB, which boasts 15,000 affiliate members, awards Accredited Green Agent and Accredited Green Broker designations.

Tataryn uses EnerGuide, LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. standards to determine a property's green quotient.

Market realities, alas, sometimes trip up even the best of green intentions. For a builder, she says, a Jacuzzi yields a better return on investment than a high-efficiency furnace or tankless hot water heater. That may not be a buyer's best return on investment, however, since green features mean lower long-term home operating costs, especially with skyrocketing energy prices.

Back in Ontario -- where, at 60 per cent, we're least inclined of all Canadians to pay more for a green home, according to that NAGAB report -- Toronto-based EcoBroker Tricia Postle has sold nothing but green residential properties in her three years as an agent. Most of them are in the pricey downtown area.

Even an ardent climate change skeptic would find it hard to argue with Postle's commitment to green when she quotes an EcoBroker International finding that "one dollar in energy savings in a home per year is worth \$20 (in additional market value)."

With buyers of pre-owned homes subsequently spending up to one-third of the purchase price on renovations, Postle has another kick at the environmental can by recommending green enhancements.

Like Postle, Bergquist points out that a home, usually our biggest investment, leaves a major environmental footprint.

"The world beyond the walls of a house is every bit as important a part of home as the house itself."

Patrick Langston is an Ottawa writer. Green Side Up appears every second Saturday in Style Weekly Homes.

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