

EVDS Grads Go Green In Ottawa

Christopher Straka and Patric Langevin teach sustainable practices whether designing individual homes or community master plans.

By Joel Finningley

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Two Faculty of Environmental Design (EVDS) alumni are blazing a trail through the Ottawa area and leaving a path of well designed, green spaces in their wake.

Christopher Straka, MEDes'03, and Patric Langevin, MArch'03, co-founded Vert Design, a community and home design firm that recently celebrated its second anniversary. After graduation they both took jobs with independent design firms in the nation's capital, and while they enjoyed what they were doing, they wanted to focus exclusively on green design. In 2006, the two long-time friends united to form one of the only inter-disciplinary firms in the market.



Patric Langevin (l) and Chris Straka
(credit Chris Klugman)

Straka says Vert Design designs places more than spaces - places that are relevant to individuals. As a result, the majority of their work is residential, and Straka and Langevin prefer to work on spaces with the people that inhabit them, as opposed to skyscrapers or airports. They seek to enhance the space not only for the individual, but also for the collective community. And although Vert Design homes include such features as locally-sourced timber, high-efficiency in-floor heating systems and low maintenance landscape design, to Straka and Langevin it is about building more than a green home.

"Ultimately it comes down to awareness, to perspective building," says Straka. He says thanks in part to their time at EVDS and experiences abroad, they are helping to expand the horizons of clients who seek green solutions in their designs.

Studying in the Faculty of Environmental Design gave Straka and Langevin the opportunity to work in an inter-disciplinary environment with other students who were interested in sustainability, something that was ahead of its time in the earlier part of the decade.

"EVDS was encouraging students to adopt a more sustainable approach to their design and the courses we were offered helped us better understand the three factors that need to be balanced: economic, ecological and social. Where we have an advantage is that we came out of a program where that kind of thinking was at the root," says Straka.

Thanks to an increase in the awareness of green design in recent years, Vert Design, a member of the Canada Green Building Council, has had great success in raising its profile and spreading the sustainability message, as can be seen by the large increase in referrals they have received.

"I think we are crossing a threshold where it is becoming mainstream and in the next couple of years it will become a norm and an expectation, in the way that we are designing today," says Straka.