



A GREEN REAL ESTATE NICHE

ECOSTYLE

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MOST brokers today resist categories, but we know that the wave of the future lies in healthy living and that fact influences real estate. So why aren't an abundance of real estate brokers screaming green? Perhaps the primary reason is lack of opportunity awareness. Green brokers have to take more initial time to pursue interest in their properties and developments than typical agents. Educational and simple presentations are key challenges.

Is better access to a "green land" dream too ideal? Consider this: New home settlements that preserve acreage with wildlife habitats and natural sources of water are blossoming everywhere. Building codes for the unusual, such as straw homes, solar heating or windmill power, are expanding with approved standards across our country. Small farm alternative agriculture interests, such as medicinal botanicals, are growing. Green community developers are integrating residential and commercial areas with appropriate retailers, like food co-ops, into their plans. And precious neighboring farmers are finding new support systems with complementary composting and recycling programs.

Indeed, green real estate for sustainable lifestyle opportunities is growing, but hardly mainstream in the 21st cen-

tury. Yet today, you can find both unknown and national brokers listing sustainable properties on web sites that focus on this niche. There are green building community directories, books, calendars of events, and discussion areas. Everywhere, the U.S.A. is embarking on green developments and countryside this way, but not all property seekers are fond of Internet searching. Securing a green broker professional may not be easy for the targeted locality by any means.

Green consumers in general are in the western U.S., and slightly less likely to live in the southern U.S., according to surveys. But interestingly, research summarizes that more than 30 percent of the U.S. population has sustainable living dreams. What is tricky about this market for realtors is that more than 80 percent of our U.S. population says they're willing to pay more for a healthy and sustainable product. Yet this group, which includes property buyers, is not in the higher income bracket. Brokers aren't certain where or how to advertise.

Green property is basically unpolluted soil, but who's proving it? Since it's typical in the 21st century to discover buried hazardous waste under new or old homes, on farmland, or on commercial property in cities, suburbs, and rural areas, there is surely a demand for more analysts. Potential property buyers, sellers, and anyone interested can contact the local USDA Cooperative Extension Service to determine some of the best conservation practices for land, but don't expect an easy formula for real estate shopping.

GROWING DEMAND FOR UNPOLLUTED LAND

With private and public pressure for unpolluted land, perhaps there is a new market for green real estate brokers and consultants to set standards for and provide a basic environmental assessment from the seller. Honest and com-

prehensive assessments can justify property prices.

Expertise in this arena has been difficult to acquire due to ever-changing consultant types. In the past, the buyer typically made the sale closing contingent on the buyer's approval of a consultant's environmental assessment, including a hazardous material report, guided by legal counsel and an engineer, at the buyer's expense. Obviously, the potential buyer has to be very determined to get to that point.

Must it be so inconvenient and costly to buy or sell real estate without environmental worries? Can green real estate brokers be or partner with analysts that provide up-to-date environmental site assessments? Don't all citizens need to know if their properties are contaminated with pollution or hazardous materials?

No doubt about it, the average broker isn't focused on green real estate. A Green Realtor has a lot of homework to do. Familiarity with the market is important to both buyer and seller and that is why the demand for environmental property consultants is bound to increase.

Well, this is my brainstorm for the moment. If you're not enthusiastic about being a green real estate broker or consultant, I hope the idea will lead you to a similar strategy for good business in demand. If you do work in such a niche, please share your progress with me. I want to know how you can expand your expertise from one geographical locale to others. Ah, growing pains! □

Delia Montgomery is an environmental design consultant and personal shopper for homes, bodies and gardens. Questions or comments are welcome. Visit www.ChicEco.com or e-mail Info@ChicEco.com. Additional information on innovative land conservation measures is available from the national offices of Nature Conservancy and such regional groups as the Wildlands Conservancy