

PARADE OF HOMES HALTON HILLS & AREA

By Mack Parliament
Director of Publications
Canadian Real Estate Association

While winter grabs us in its fury in the most unexpected ways and at the most unexpected times it brings home forcibly to us one of the ways in which Canada is truly distinctive — climatically.

Canadians live in a circumpolar country with oceans on three sides and as such we have important geographic differences and extremes in climate.

Yet in some ways, rather than exploit our individuality, we are inclined to be copycats of sorts and build houses more suitable to other climates.

Steps are only now being taken to force builders of new homes to recognize the fact that the Canadian climate is severe and that one way to lower home operating costs is to have houses adequately insulated at the time of erection.

But this may never have occurred if the price of oil and heating energy generally had not escalated to its present levels. Canadians were content to waste energy with reckless abandon until high costs were ushered in by the OPEC cartel earlier this decade. Even now, it has been established that Canadians consume more energy per person than any other country. For a while the affluence of Canadians will permit them to afford it, but eventually those living in under-insulated homes will have to take corrective action and do other things to reduce consumption of rapidly dwindling energy resources.

The seriousness of the situation is demonstrated by the fact that housing accounts for the expenditure of 40 per cent of the world's energy consumption and part of this is due to waste.

If there is to be adequate supplies of fuel for generations following this one is the time for all society to become the conserving society, not just those who cannot afford to waste high cost energy.

There are, perhaps, too many examples of Canadian housing following patterns established elsewhere, which do not conserve energy and which were not designed for Canadian climatic conditions.

For example, the carport appendage to a house may protect a car's paint from the hot summer sun, but it does a little to protect it from the winter winds and below zero temperatures. This often results in cars which won't start, while those which do require a longer warm-up period

which wastes fuel. Carports may be great in California but they can be grim in Canada.

Introducing more than 20 years ago was the so-called "core floor home." Basically, the one-storey house was built on a concrete slab with open cores in it which acted as heating ducts; the floors were always warm — a plus for playing children — and the structure offered a low profile to cold winds. But the house never enjoyed any lasting popularity. Home owners wanted to be higher up in the world and were prepared to burn more fuel to get off the ground.

But a trend already established commercially in Montreal, Toronto and other cities as underground shopping malls and offices could conceivably be the forerunner of underground housing and industries.

At the very least there would be energy savings. For in Toronto, for instance, the earth's temperature 20 feet (6.1 metres) below the surface is 8C (46F) — about the same as the average annual above ground temperature. It has been estimated that energy savings at this level could be as high as 75 per cent, compared to above ground costs.

This has been ably demonstrated in Kansas City, Kansas in both heating and cooling savings at the Inland Storage Distribution Centre in caverns under the city left from limestone mining. Manufacturers of boats, optical instruments and office equipment occupy more than 20 million square feet (1,858,061 square metres) below the city. Compared with conventional above ground facilities, inland's refrigeration costs are \$90,000 a month underground compared to the \$300,000 they would be above ground.

In Sacramento Calif., an innovatively designed 237,000 square foot (22,018 square metre) office building will use both the benefits of being partially subterranean and harnessing solar energy for heating and air conditioning. The underground portion of the \$12.7 million structure is so well insulated by the earth that temperatures will remain comfortable for up to eight hours after heating or air conditioning have been shut off. Overall gain of the underground design is a reduction of more than half in energy requirements compared with a similar-sized building above ground. An added bonus is an open, park-like area at grade level.

The possibilities for underground living have not

been overlooked by imaginative individuals. In Plainview, Texas, for instance, Bill Hamman, his wife and five children share a concrete shell more than 10 feet (3.04 metres) underground. The four-bedroom, three-bath home even boasts an underground patio. Above ground is a two-car garage, storage room, another patio and a courtyard of cedar, juniper, roses and other flowers.

Energy bills for others in the area are often \$300 a month with the extremes of heat and cold, but the Hammans manage nicely on less than \$80. They not only beat the heat and cold but noise and pollution too. The only dirt they get is what they bring themselves.

Although there is a woodburning fireplace in the dwelling the Hammans have never had a chance to use it as temperatures range from 19C (66F) to 23C (77F) without it.

In Edwardsville, Illinois, Gary Davis who owns U'Bahn Earth Homes Inc., practices what he preaches and lives in an energy-saving home of more than 4,000 square feet (371.6 square metres) built mostly underground. While some people are complaining about the high cost of new homes, Davis says a conventional \$160,000 home can be built as an underground structure for \$80,000.

Maintenance costs are lower because there is no siding to paint and no roof to replace. The roof of Davis' home is concrete and covered with two feet of soil and sod. Light enters through a large glass dome in the centre of the roof.

He estimates underground homes in that area would maintain a year-round temperature of 13C (56F). In his solar energy is used to raise the temperature to the desired level. Once reached, it can be maintained for 12 hours. If needed, there is a fireplace, which Davis says can heat the entire house. He estimates an annual heating and cooling bill of only \$375.

While the accent in Canada so far has been to reduce domestic energy costs by other means, such as insulation, solar heating and cooling and improved construction, the day may not be far distant when some enterprising and imaginative builder sets a new trend with an underground residential subdivision.

With Canada's climate and dwindling energy resources the day of more underground living may not be far off. Will the basement apartment dwellers of today be called the pioneers of underground living tomorrow?



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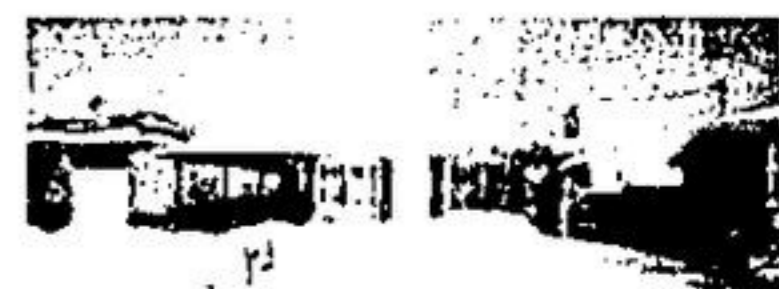
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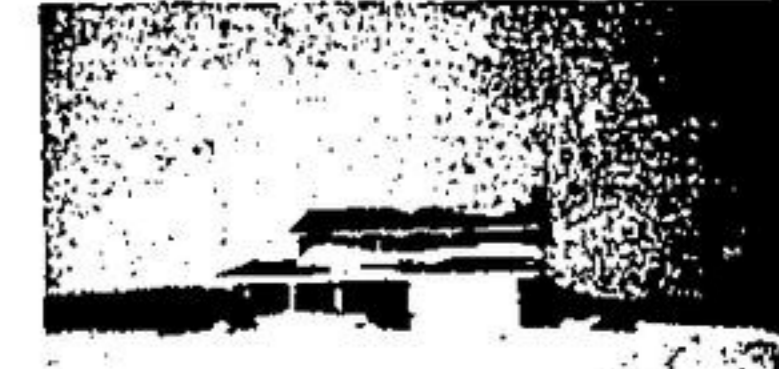
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COUNTRY VIEW

Beautiful Terra Cotta location, overlooking conservation area. Cross country skiing and snowmobiling at your back door makes winter weekends an occasion to look forward to with your friends. Spring and summer find you next door to one of Ontario's most scenic recreation areas. Listed at \$66,900. This 7 room home with 23 x 23' raised living room offers a panoramic view of the surrounding area. Call now for an appointment to view.

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