



Q&A With Sustainable Development Trailblazer Michael Namer



Michael Namer, CEO of Alfa Development, which has six Manhattan buildings in its Green Collection. AMBIKA SINGH

By **Heather Senison**

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Michael Namer is among New York City's top sustainability advocates in one of its biggest industries: real estate.

His company, Alfa Development, has six Manhattan buildings in its Green Collection, starting with Village Green at 311 E. 11 St., which was completed in 2008 and is certified LEED Gold.

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The firm's most recent project at 200 E. 21st St. in Gramercy Park, slated to open this year, is also going for the Gold. Its eco-friendly features will include a living green wall in its lobby and an insulating rooftop terrace. The building's water system is solar-powered and it can collect and reuse 3,500 gallons of rain.

I asked Namer about his commitment to eco-friendly housing and where he sees the trend going:

What sparked your interest in sustainability?

My son was a kid at the time, 12, 13, or 14 [years old], and he came up to me in 2005 and he said, "Why don't you build green buildings dad? I go to school every day and the teachers tell us how we need to be more cognizant of sustainability in our buildings and where we live." And I said, "that's what we're going to do." And I told my partner at the time, Gary Spindler, that we were going to build a green building and he took out a dollar bill and said, "this kind of green?" and I said, "no, you know what I mean." And so Village Green was our first LEED Gold building, and we delivered the building in 2008, and we realized that we were able to convert and make a building that achieved the Gold standard of sustainability in New York City.

Your son must be proud of you.

The kids know better than us, they're used to seeing bad things and they see things in a different way that we do. They're worried because we have news coming out that in 15 years there are not going to be any more fish in the ocean. In 20 years the forests are going to be deforested. It's scary. I'm seeing more companies deciding to green, which has always been my goal, to teach and to show and to let them come and see how we do it so that they can also do it. More of us can actually help each other to create green buildings that reduce greenhouse gases.

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Alfa Development is known to be a family business, is it still?

All my kids and my nephews are in the business, some of them work full-time, some of them are contributing members. They are all cognizant that we are sustainable builders. We want to make sure that the world doesn't become a wasteland, and I say that sincerely.

Aren't green projects expensive?

There was a very big shrink in builders that want to do sustainability because they think it's too expensive. The question everybody asks me is, "doesn't it cost more to build a green building?" and my answer's been no, because it's the same cost because we build luxury buildings. We make a choice on the materials that we use, the mechanics that we use, how we make sure that these things are actually creating an environment where there's a reduction of greenhouse gases in the building.

How does living in a sustainable development financially affect its residents?

The first building [at 151 Wooster St.] was in a big loft building that I renovated. We didn't go for the LEED certification, but we put in all the [green] components and we started finding vendors that had mechanical engineering that reduced the consumption of energy in their heat and air conditioning. All of that I did without going for the LEED certification. So after we did the actual building Village Green that received the [LEED] Gold, I went back to look at what I had done [at 151 Wooster]. Strangely enough, the management company says to us, "We have a surplus of \$200,000," and we go, "How did you do that?," and he goes, "Your heating and air conditioning costs are half the amount at [other buildings.]" So I actually gave money back to the buyers and then they lowered their common charges. The water and the heating, all that, was a quarter of the [normal] amount, with the systems that we put in.

What do you see for the future in green housing?

Cornell University did the first large-scale Passive House, which received a LEED Platinum, so that's the future. Passive means you don't have to actively be putting [machinery] in there to make it work because the design of the building takes care of itself. It's expensive right now and it's difficult to do, but I think in the near future more people are going to be building passive houses. It's a method of doing something with a reduction of mechanicals and things that are additional.

Any tips for apartment-dwellers who want to reduce their environmental impact?

The first thing that I can say is, get new windows. If you have a building that's older and you want to really reduce your costs, the best thing is to seal the building so that you

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have no heat loss. Buy very robust window designs, that makes a big difference in the build. Additionally, so you have a building and it has a boiler, make a decision - don't buy one that's going to last for eight years and burn out. Buy something that's a little more expensive but reduces energy. When it comes time to change that equipment, buy the good ones.

Thank you. Do you have any final thoughts?

The word "sustainability" is the key. It's not about the LEED [certification], it's not about eco-whatever, it's about using and producing housing that continues to be safe to live in, and being in a place that is contributing to a better life.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/heathersenison/2018/10/30/qa-with-sustainable-building-trailblazer-michael-namer/#24172e759cd6>