

The green home effect

In our clean and soon-to-be greener city-state, a number of new ways to decrease our carbon footprints are emerging. **Sabrina Lee** finds out how homeowners and house-builders are taking action to help out Mother Earth



They say going green starts at home, but when the initial cost of setting up energy-saving LED lights is triple that of a standard halogen tube, it's hard for any homeowner to worry more about the ozone layer than the hole burning through their pocket. However, there are other affordable ways to be eco-friendly, and on a larger scale.

For the property buyer seeking a clean slate, buying into Singapore's first eco-friendly public housing – Treelodge@Punggol – is an option. Made under the Build-To-Order (BTO) system, Treelodge@Punggol's most impressive feature is its roof. According to project manager Ng Bingrong, its solar panels 'will generate enough power for common area lighting within the entire precinct at night'.

While the project is one of very few green listed homes on the Singapore market today, increasing environmental awareness has created a niche of eco-friendly architects and landscapers. 'Many of our younger architects

are well-trained and knowledgeable in the area,' says Dr Milton Tan, executive director of DesignSingapore Council and head of the School of Architecture at NUS. 'There is also the BCA Green Mark Award, which is supported by the National Environment Agency. This award is based on a rating system that measures the environmental impact and performance of a structure – thereby encouraging developers, designers and builders to consider energy and water savings.'

Chang Yong Ter of Chang Architects understands the necessity to preserve the Earth's natural resources. 'As architects, our responsibility lies not only with our clients but the environment as well. Whatever we destroy, we replace it with something that's friendly

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to the environment,' he says. In 2008, Chang was given the opportunity to demonstrate his beliefs with a two-storey house in Jalan Elok (pictured). The result? A house designed to let air circulate freely, which reduces the need for air-conditioning, and a water feature that uses timer-controlled irrigation pipes connected to a pond that also keeps the plants hydrated. But how much does one really save? 'It's difficult to quantify the amount as every homeowner uses different amounts of electricity,' Chang says. 'But if I had to give a rough estimate, I would say the Jalan Elok house shaves 30 to 40 per cent off electricity consumption.'

Supporting Chang's eco-aware constructions are entre-

preneurs like 31-year-old Francis Teo. Founder of SuperTimber (www.supertimber.com), Teo has built his business around the principle of conserving forests through responsible wood use. SuperTimber gives customers the option to deck their patio with fibre-reinforced composite (FRC), a new timber made from 60 per cent rice husk from Malaysia and 40 per cent recycled polymers. While Teo wasn't the first to come up with alternatives – a large number of homeowners opt for composite wood (80 per cent PVC and 20 per cent wood fibre) instead of teak – his products are certainly more environmentally friendly. Teo's recent projects have included an eco-resort in Malacca, as well as the Orgo, an open-air bar located on the fourth floor of the Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay.

On a smaller scale, green-minded consumers can try products like the cableless Sunnan lamp (\$49) from IKEA; its rechargeable solar cell panel transforms sunlight into electrical energy. There are also house-cleaning companies, such as Green Cleaners (www.greencleaners.asia), who only use non-toxic and biodegradable products. Architect Chang says this is encouraging: 'More people are seeing tangible benefits to such services and we are convinced that going green isn't just a trend. You will reap the benefits and so will the Earth.'

