

a passion for green buildings

Structures that 'fit with the land'

Peter Garver turns older buildings into environmentally friendly structures

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Standing in the exposed-brick lobby of Howard County's government offices, Peter Z. Garver points out the building's many environmental offenses.

The place wastes bucket-loads of water. The windows, the lighting, the restroom fixtures are all so wrong. So is the maintenance crew's cleaning solution, for that matter.

It will be Garver's job to change all that.

Helping aging buildings go green is not a flashy undertaking. Garver, a contractor leading the county renovation project, has just emerged from a meeting about keeping debris out of ductwork and achieving efficient flushing in the bathrooms.

"Nature to me is my church; nature has always been important to me," said Garver, 46, president of Sustainable Development Partnerships. "To me, it's always made sense that a building should fit with the land, to design in a way that works with the environment instead of fighting it. It's not just fashionable. It is good business."

For years, Garver has made environmentally friendly design a priority in his work as both a developer and an architect — even when it was seen as unnecessary.

Now, it seems that the market is finally catching up; in Maryland alone, the number of projects working toward certification by the U.S. Green Building Council has doubled in a year and could double again in the next year, experts say.

Besides the Howard County job, Garver is a consultant on a "green" resort planned for the Chester River in Queenstown. He is also a consultant on the conversion of an old wool mill in Lawrence, Mass., into 290 apartments.

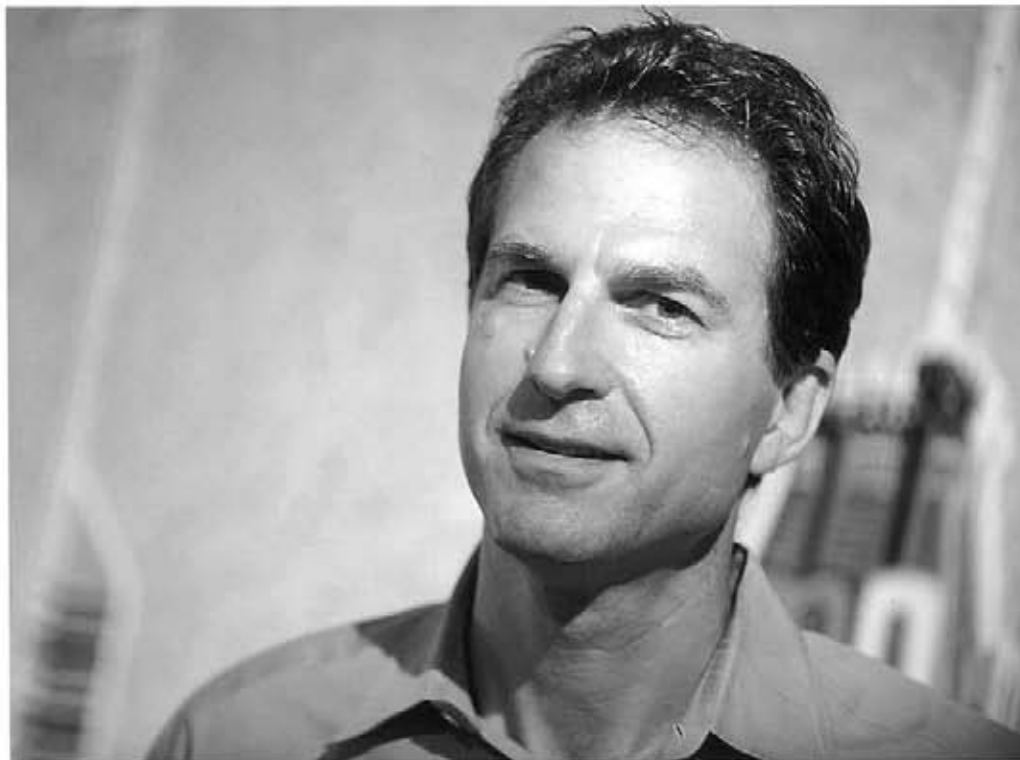
Garver says his interest in the environment goes back as far as he can remember.

As an 11-year-old in York, Pa., he followed two older brothers into Boy Scouts because it meant camping every month and building nature trails. In high school, he decided to become an architect and around the same time became fascinated by solar energy. As an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin, he designed a solar, affordable house for an independent study project.

Even before the green movement, he'd quiz product representatives about the environmental sensitivity of their wares. But he could go only so far.

"As an architect, you're always answering to an owner, and owners were not interested" in being green-minded, he said. "There was resistance to it, even among knowledgeable people."

Garver's wife of 18 years, architect Julie Gabrielli, has also spent much of her career championing energy-efficient, environmentally friendly concepts — at work and at home. She drives a hybrid Honda and makes her own cleaning solutions, substituting club



Peter Garver: "Nature to me is my church." BALTIMORE SUN PHOTO MONICA LOPOSSAY

soda for Windex, for instance, which is safe enough to use around their 6-year-old son.

"We don't buy cleaners anymore; it's nicer to know I'm not poisoning any of us from cleaning the house, and it's so easy," to make your own out of say, baking soda and lemon juice for sinks and counters and vinegar, lemon oil and olive oil for wood, she said. And "we don't use ... paper napkins, or paper towels."

She and her husband renovated the house they bought four years ago in Mount Washington with energy-efficient touches such as extra insulation, triple-glazed windows and a more environmentally friendly linoleum floor.

For his part, Garver often bikes the mile from home to his office in a former cotton mill and uses a push lawn mower.

He still spends much of his free time outdoors, sailing on the bay with his family or going cross-country skiing.

Earlier this year, Garver gave up a job as vice president of development at Corporate Office Properties Trust, a Columbia-based suburban developer, to launch his business. His idea was to start out as a consultant and move into developing green, mixed-use

projects as an owner

"Peter knows what he's doing, and I don't," said Lex Birney, the developer of the "green" resort planned for Queenstown. "He's got that blend of architectural knowledge and sustainability, where the whole world is moving, and where we're trying to move our company."

Birney's Annapolis-based firm, The Brick Cos., plans a 150-room inn that could include displays to educate guests about the Chesapeake Bay and offer nature trails, kayaking, fishing charters and even a boat-building project. Birney hopes to install geothermal heating and cooling systems, as well as sustainable materials in wall coverings and furniture. He also envisions subterranean parking with a living roof.

Garver got his first big green project in 2001, after having worked as an architect for more than a decade and then branching into housing development.

Volunteering on his community association's land use committee in Mount Washington, he had gotten to know developer Samuel K. Himmelrich Jr. Himmelrich, who had redeveloped Mount Washington Mill, wanted to make a "green" office building out of

the 1.3-million-square-foot former Montgomery Ward department store and catalog distribution center that sat vacant in Southwest Baltimore.

The developer put Garver in charge of design, construction and leasing for the project.

It features a green roof planted with alpine vegetation and incorporated at least one of Garver's ideas: grinding up the glass from 64,000 windows that were removed and mixing the material into the parking lot's asphalt paving.

The environmental sustainability helped land the first, and one of the biggest tenants, the Maryland Department of the Environment.

As the Montgomery Park project wound down, Garver moved to COPT, where he led an effort to develop a green culture and managed development and maintenance of new "green" office buildings. His boss nicknamed him "Mr. Greenjeans."

By 2003, when Garver was hired, the company had decided that any new buildings would have Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification, a nationally recognized standard for water efficiency, air quality and materials, said Rand Griffin, COPT's chief executive.

"We had been studying this a lot," Griffin said. "We felt it was the right thing to do. Sometimes that's enough of a compelling reason."

But he adds that the young workers who replace retiring baby boomers "are very motivated by the environment. If you have a green building, an employer can mention that to potential employees, and you have a competitive long-range advantage that theoretically over time should make your buildings more valuable."

The company now has 33 buildings that have won a LEED certification or are in the final stages of certification, Griffin said.

Those with a "gold" certification average savings of 40 percent on electricity and 50 percent on water usage.

Cutting back on water consumption is a key goal as Howard County renovates a government building that was built in 1976 and houses offices for the county executive and County Council.

New touches will include bike racks, native plantings that require less water, rain barrels for outdoor watering and "task" lighting to save on electricity. The county may purchase "green" power, possibly wind-generated energy, and plans to recycle about three-quarters of the material demolished in the reconstruction. Water consumption should be cut by about 30 percent, in large part by installing efficient, motion-detector faucets in bathrooms.

"There's a lot of technical minutia, and it's not flashy," Garver said. "But we're making buildings more efficient."