



## Canada-Based Builder Introduces Green Label to Its Florida Communities

The Minto Group has been emphasizing the sustainability of its products for a decade.

By: John Caulfield



**A DIFFERENT SHADE OF GREEN:** The Minto Group's new community in Florida, Cascada at Monterra, will feature townhouses that are being marketed under the builder's "Minto Blue" label, which indicates they can meet the sustainable standards of five different ratings agencies.

Credit: The Minto Group

The Minto Group one of Canada's greenest production builders, recently started selling houses at the Monterra master planned community in Cooper City, Fla., where Minto is marketing its attached products under its new "Minto Blue" label. The label signifies that

the homes will meet the sustainable design and construction standards of five different agencies: LEED, Energy Star, the NAHB's National Green Building Program, the Florida Green Building Coalition, and Florida Power & Light BuildSmart.

Overkill? Not when "sustainable" and "green" are search words that U.S. buyers now use to find houses and neighborhoods online, says Glen Trotta, vice president of marketing for Minto's Florida division.

Minto, a 55-year-old builder based in Ottawa, Ontario, has operated in Florida for two decades and currently sells from 10 communities there. Cascada at Monterra, which when completed will have 148 attached townhouses ranging from 1,400 to 1,700 square feet, is its first significant application of Minto Blue, says Jim Traxinger, executive vice president of the company's Southeast Florida operations. The sustainable features in those homes will include double-paned, Argon-insulated low-emissivity windows, sliders, and doors; high-efficiency HVAC systems; Energy Star-rated appliances and bathroom exhaust fans; water-saving bath fixtures and outdoor irrigation; and low-VOC carpets and paint.

On its website, Minto claims that its homes can reduce an owner's utility bills by up to \$11,328 over a 20-year period compared to other new homes built to code, and by up to \$31,037 compared to a 10-year-old house. Equally noteworthy is the opening price point of Cascada's townhouses, which start in the low \$200s.

"The problem with a lot of 'green' builders is that they don't know what to do," says Andrew Pride, vice president of Minto's green group, who oversees its sustainable strategies. "They don't understand that green doesn't have to be massively expensive, but it should be massively impactful." Traxinger adds that his division has kept construction costs down by working with trades and suppliers "to leverage the market, and do more with less."

**GREATER VALUE:** Water-saving bath fixtures are among the features offered in The Minto Group's new community, Cascada at Monterra, where its homes will start in the low \$200s.

Credit: The Minto Group

Minto Group has gained a reputation as a value builder on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border. Last month, the Ontario Home Builders Association named Minto its Green Builder of the Year for the second time in the past three years. Building sustainable homes "is a deep-rooted philosophy that every employee cares about," boasts Pride. But marketing the value of sustainable homes requires different tactics in each country. In Canada, consumers have long expected the houses they buy to be sustainable, as people and their government there "are heavily focused on the environment," says Pride. The cost of green is less of a fact in Canada, where home prices in general are higher and building codes more stringent than those in the U.S. "It's like California," he says.

Conversely, Floridians “are more concerned about dollars and cents, and are more likely to say ‘show me the energy chart’ to see how much they’ll save. So it’s an education.” Traxinger notes that move-up buyers at some of Minto’s Florida communities “are looking to do the right thing,” and therefore are receptive to sustainability as a selling point.

Traxinger points out as well that Florida could soon have some of the greenest building codes in the country, after the state’s Building Commission last month moved to completely revise its Energy Efficiency Conservation Code, using the 2009 International Energy Conservation Code as its foundation. If all goes as planned, the final rule adopting the revised codes would be filed next February.

Those changes could prove to be beneficial for a green builder such as Minto, which expanded its presence in Florida two years ago when it opened an office in Tampa, and has since been making strategic acquisitions in West-Central Florida “We’ve been patient and have made some strong moves,” says Traxinger, whose company expects to open another subdivision in the Monterra master plan in 2011.

*John Caulfield is a senior editor for BUILDER magazine.*