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Five years ago, New York’s buildings, save for a few in Battery Park City and the Audubon Society’s headquarters, were about as ecofriendly as Cadillac Escalades. Tax credits and consumer demand (and maybe Al Gore) have changed all that, and now each month seems to bring a new building that’s all but built from hemp. But which ones are really saving -resources, and which are just “green-washing”—doing the minimum to collect those credits and alleviate guilt? One way to tell is the U.S. Green Building Council’s benchmark leed certification, offered in four levels, from basic to platinum. We spoke with experts, including the advocacy nonprofit GreenHomeNYC, and rated buildings on a Green-o-Meter that runs from Dick Cheney to Laurie David.

BUILDING

London Terrace Towers: The behemoth thirties co-op in Chelsea.



ECO-FEATURES

Board member Susan Singer (who’s also a Corcoran agent) has handed out hundreds of compact fluorescent bulbs to residents; paper products in common areas are recycled; energy-saving heaters and window shades are under discussion.



THE VERDICT

A pat on the back for trying. Older buildings are hard to retrofit, and they get fewer tax rebates for this stuff, notes GreenHomeNYC’s Gita Nandan.



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BUILDING

Kalahari: A 249-unit condo in Harlem.

ECO-FEATURES

Built with recycled and “healthier” materials, like paints that don’t emit volatile organic compounds; solar and wind power; power-saving appliances in all apartments.



THE VERDICT

A decent effort, especially if that wind-and-solar angle turns out to work as planned.

BUILDING

Harsen House: A new 22-unit luxury condo on West 72nd Street.

ECO-FEATURES

Energy-efficient windows and water-heating system; oak floors that the Forest Stewardship Council declares are from “ecologically well-managed forests”; oven hoods that vent directly outside (so you don’t have to crank up the A/C when the oven’s on).



THE VERDICT

About to get the basic LEED stamp, one of the first so certified on the Upper West Side.



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BUILDING

The Lucida: Extell Development's 110-unit condo on East 85th Street.



ECO-FEATURES

Rainwater irrigates the garden; energy-saving "envelope" and mechanicals; light-hued roofing materials supposedly keep interiors cooler in summer; bamboo, cork, and sustainably harvested wood interior finishes.



THE VERDICT

A first on the Upper East Side. But it has only the most basic LEED certification (26 to 32 points out of 69). Regular buildings that get city funding make the same cut.

BUILDING

Archstone Clinton: A newly opened rental building on West 52nd Street.

ECO-FEATURES

Automated lights that go on only when necessary; no- and low-fume materials used indoors; super-energy-efficient glass; roof-mounted microturbines use waste heat.



THE VERDICT

Has achieved basic LEED certification—good, but not a world-saver.



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BUILDING

e7 project: A seven-unit boutique condo in Williamsburg.



ECO-FEATURES

A geothermal system heats and cools the structure; 40 percent of interiors are finished with recycled materials; landscaped roof to keep things cool; LED and CF lighting installed everywhere.



THE VERDICT

Also aiming for silver status. (Nandan is the project architect.)

BUILDING

Greenbelt: A warehouse being converted into eight apartments on Manhattan Avenue in Williamsburg.

ECO-FEATURES

A host of green features, including solar panels to power parts of the building. Also, though much of the warehouse was demolished for the conversion, the builders are using lots of salvaged materials from it, an inherently greener process than starting from scratch.



THE VERDICT

It will be LEED-certified silver—the next tier of approval—and “it’s totally cool they’re reusing the materials,” says Nandan. “They get props for that.”



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BUILDING

Riverhouse: A 264-unit luxury condo in Battery Park City.

ECO-FEATURES

A geothermal well heats and cools common spaces; solar panels on the roof; microturbines harness waste heat; insulated windows.



THE VERDICT

Meets the gold standard, literally.

BUILDING

The Helena: A 39-story rental tower in the West Fifties.

ECO-FEATURES

Solar panels and wind power supply electricity. According to the journal GreenSource, it aims to use 65 percent as much energy and one-third the potable water of similar properties.



THE VERDICT

Far more ambitious than most. Meets LEED's "gold" rating—minimum 39 points.



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BUILDING

The Visionaire: A 35-story, 251-unit condo project also in Battery Park City.



ECO-FEATURES

An intricate system that filters water from bathrooms and kitchens, then pumps it back for use in toilets; green roof; will obtain 35 percent of its electricity from renewable sources; and more.



THE VERDICT

It's the only residential building in the U.S. to achieve the LEED platinum rating. That requires "a lot of things that aren't [even] cost-effective," says Nandan.