



WindSong's 34 townhouses flank an indoor walkway lined with patio furniture and plants. Here, Alan Carpenter and Valerie McIntyre (ABOVE) catch up on some work, while Gerry Kilgannon (OPPOSITE) relaxes. Their community is one of 13 affiliated with the Ecovillage Network of Canada.

aspire to building an ecovillage. "People have to be able to commit themselves to the project" — then wait years for their dream to be realized.

BY 1994, CARPENTER'S GROUP had grown to more than 20 people and included a town planner, several schoolteachers, a lawyer and an electrician. Another new member was Valerie McIntyre, a committed activist involved in movements for peace, social justice and the environment. At the time, McIntyre, her husband and three children lived in a two-storey house in suburban Coquitlam. But they were ready to make the move to a more co-operative setting. "I had this obsession, really," she says. "I wanted to find out how we could create peace in the world."

McIntyre was convinced that world peace depended on individuals learning how to live together in small communities. "It's all about collaborative decision making — sharing power and participatory democracy."

All WindSong's founding members shared a similar philosophy. Langley's existing residents, however, were skeptical. Carpenter, McIntyre and the others spent countless hours in meetings and less formal conversations with local officials, community leaders and neighbours, especially those who lived in Chelsea Green, the gated adult community of upscale townhouses right next to their land. "There was some concern among the residents there when they heard we were a community that planned to eat together and support each other," recalls McIntyre. "But when they met us and realized we were ordinary, well-balanced individuals, they began to understand what we wanted to do."

Still, the advance work took five years. During that time, WindSong's founders not only addressed the concerns of their neighbours with a consistent and well-orchestrated public-relations strategy, they also invested more than \$300,000 in fees, surveys, designs, plans and architectural drawings. At a substantial cost, they modified their plans so that WindSong's 34 townhouses would stand far enough from the creek to comply with Langley's evolving environmental regulations. They made progress, Carpenter says, because they hired an American consultant with experience in developing communal housing projects. "There were no Canadian ecovillages in existence yet, so there was no one in Canada qualified to help us."

In addition to sharing a vision of community, WindSong's sponsors wanted to minimize their environmental impact. They clustered the attached houses and amenities and left two-thirds of the property, including the entire wetland and forest, untouched. They also incorporated into the project some recycled building materials, as well as non-toxic flooring and cabinets and water-preserving toilets and appliances.

While none of this deviates radically from conventional building practices, banks and mortgage lenders found the concept of WindSong difficult to understand. To finance the \$7 million project, the founders eventually turned to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and paid a premium for a CMHC-insured loan.



'It was euphoria all round when we saw our dream come true after six years of hard work.'

