

Green or Red?

We all need homes to live in. But are we living in environmentally friendly homes? If we go from one room to another in our homes, we are likely to find things that are not so eco-friendly like having a fan on with windows closed or water from the shower going literally down the drain instead of saving it to be used for other purposes.

Even if we go for a walk in our villages, towns and cities, one may observe buildings that are different in shape, size and with a mixture of building materials and furniture. One may see blocks of flats, terraced houses, villas and bungalows or perhaps even a palace. How many of these are sustainable homes?

Many old homes have been built with techniques that are environmentally friendly. These traditional homes were usually built and furnished with natural products. In Malta, the building of old houses was relatively small but had large open spaces, usually with a central courtyard or a terrace next to the first floor rooms. These yards and terraces were full of plants typical of our climate. Many had climbers such as vines that used to provide shade and food. The traditional homes had thick walls for insulation and to limit noise pollution. Windows in these old homes were tall and relatively narrow so that not too much sun may enter the room but allowing substantial air and light in. Many windows had louvered apertures or were covered with bamboo curtains to provide shade, yet allowing a breeze in. In addition, these houses have balconies and terraces, the latter often used to dry clothes outside. Most of these houses have wells for the storage of rainwater gathered from roofs. Some even have cellars where in the past they were used for storage and rearing of animals such as rabbits. These were certainly green homes.

Unfortunately, many of these homes are being demolished and replaced by apartments. This is very beneficial because land in Malta is very scarce. Some of these apartments are built using sustainable practices like having a terrace or large balconies for each unit. They may have large windows to allow natural light in. But many of the apartments that had been built leave much to be desired and are not eco-friendly. Some have small windows so you need to switch on the light for most

of the day. They have to switch on the fan or air conditioners because no breeze can flow in. Some may not even have a small terrace or balcony where to dry clothes. Nowadays, the balcony is often an extension of a small room. They cannot even fix solar panels or photo voltaic cells because the roof is used as a penthouse. No water is collected from the large roofs to be used as a communal well. Large blocks of apartments are built next to each other with very limited open space providing lack of privacy and no space for children to play. Instead these children have to play in streets amongst parked cars and traffic passing by. These types of homes are not green homes but should be given the red light.

I think the building of new homes should be more considerate to the people who are going to live in them and even to our Earth. Architects should incorporate the use of traditional practices into our modern homes. All rooms should use energy saving bulbs and be installed with equipment to monitor our carbon footprint. Homes should have devices where water from the bathrooms and washing could be recycled for toilet purposes or other things. In our sunny Malta, all homes should be installed with solar panels and photo voltaic cells so that the use of renewable energy on our islands would increase substantially. If our homes are green instead of red, we will give a chance to our Earth to be a better place to live in.



Solar panels on the roof top would help to make our homes green!

A typical traditional Maltese house



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