

## Industry Perspectives: The French connection – why does Canada import wood from Europe?

by Richard Lyall Oct 18, 2017 last update: Oct 20, 2017

When I look at the tall wood buildings being constructed around the world, I often wonder why Canada isn't leading this obvious form of construction innovation from coast to coast.



There are plans for tall wood all over Europe: London's 80-storey Toothpick, the 35-storey Baobab in Paris, the 33-storey Tratoppen in Stockholm.

Every time I learn of a new wood building in Europe, I wonder why our heavily forested country isn't doing more with wood construction.

But the news isn't all bad. I have had the good fortune of visiting a few wood buildings in Canada: the University of British Columbia's 18-storey Brock Commons student residence, which is currently the world's tallest wood building, as well as Quebec City's Origine at 13 storeys and Montreal's Arbora, which is eight storeys.

While mid-rise wood between four and six storeys is slowly catching on all over Ontario, builders want to go above six, which is low compared to other jurisdictions.

Well, say no more.

**The Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON)**, an association comprised of 200 of the province's top builders, is working with Ontario's ministries of natural resources and forestry and municipal affairs to create a tall wood reference document to guide building

designers and municipal officials on using alternative solutions to construct wood buildings over six storeys.

This document hopefully will be published by year's end. Our association is honoured to provide input and share experience with the ministries as they usher in a new era of construction innovation.

To learn more about this, a team of builders and staff recently flew to Bordeaux, France, for the first world congress on tall wood construction.

It was called Woodrise, a joint Japan-France-Canada symposium on the imperative of intensifying urban areas and fighting climate change by creating more tall buildings out of wood.

For the uninitiated, wood as a building material is unsurpassed in global carbon capture and fighting climate change. In France, it is a priority relative to meeting Paris Climate Accord obligations.

We'd like to see more wood used in Canada.

On that front, our team was happy to learn at the symposium that the National Building Code of Canada is considering introducing tall, mass-timber construction by 2020.

To make this happen, we need governments at all levels in Canada to walk the talk on innovation and modernizing our clogged approvals process.

In Canada, and especially Ontario, this has stymied innovation.

Unlike other jurisdictions, Ontario has yet to fully realize the potential of wood innovation, especially to fill the "missing middle" (mid-rise, stacked townhomes, semi-detached homes).

A mid-rise wood housing boom would increase desperately needed supply across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and put a dent in climate change.

But there are challenges ahead for wood construction. The best priced cross-laminated timber (CLT) materials are from — you guessed it — Europe.

In fact, one Ontario builder told me in France that he was quoted a 20 per cent lower price on CLT by a European supplier.

Imagine that? Ontario is an importer of wood from Europe. Our founding fathers would be scratching their heads if they heard this.

Canada's ambassador to Germany, Stephane Dion — who was working hard to create opportunities at Woodrise — asked me why Ontario businesses are not doing more business in Europe.

I told him Ontario is behind on innovation and material production; in other words, you can't compete abroad if you can't do it at home.

So let me be clear. Ontario's construction industry wants to be innovative by building new homes and commercial buildings out of wood.

As advocates of timber construction in Canada, it was my honour to join Dion and renowned B.C. architect Michael Green as three of the initial signatories of the International Woodrise Alliance.

While we happily anticipate Ontario's acceleration of the approval of wood buildings over six storeys, we eventually need to be building even higher with a locally supplied, renewable resource — wood.

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## Photo



The RESCON team, including RESCON chair Bruno Giancola (fourth from left), president Richard Lyall (seventh from the left), vice-president Andrew Pariser (ninth from left) and past chair Tad Putyra (right) pose at a 2.7-kilometre natural sand dune in Arachon in southwest France.

Photo: Rescon