Quality Up, Bottom Line Up

SIFTON PROPERTIES - RICHMOND HILL PROJECT

LONDON, ONTARIO

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Sifton Properties' Richmond Hill project in London, Ontario, consists of 100 single detached homes all using light steel framing for interior partitions.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION TEAM

PROJECT DEVELOPER:
Sifton Properties

LIGHT STEEL FRAMING INSTALLERS:
Cro-Can (Ontario) Ltd.; Stoy Partition & Ceiling Systems

Sifton Properties is the largest residential builder in London and the southwestern Ontario region. The company was one of the first builders in Canada to specialize in the development of planned urban and suburban communities offering residents complete housing, rental, recreational, shopping and commercial services. Like all businesses today, Sifton seeks to provide improved quality while optimizing the bottom line. One strategy which is achieving that goal is the change from lumber to light steel framing (LSF) for interior non-loadbearing walls.

Sifton switched to LSF in 1998. Since then, LSF has been used in residential projects including single family dwellings and condominiums. Thus far, somewhere on the order of 275 to 300 residential units have been built using LSF. Today and for the future, it is Sifton's intent to use LSF on all such projects. An example is the 400-acre gated London community of River Bend, which at completion will see 500 homes incorporating steel framing.

The project featured in this article is Richmond Hill, also in London, involving close to 100 detached homes. Seven different home models including two-storey are being built using Sifton's "Step by Step" process. Sifton Production Manager Ron Leboldus explains the process and the commitment to LSF.

"Our approach is to gather a 'wish list' from a group of potential purchasers and incorporate them into say half-a-dozen house plans. The second step is to then develop all the construction details involving superior quality engineered products from the inside out - from the Galvalume™ and galvanized LSF for interior framing, to our electrical and mechanical systems, to maintenance-free exteriors - all with an emphasis on quality that is affordable. This process results in homes consumers find desirable, yet at significant savings to what they might expect. The main benefits to LSF are cost savings from no call-backs for warpage, nail popping or cracks, plus ease of use."

Unlike most builders, Sifton has the drywallers install the non-loadbearing LSF and finds that the electrical, plumbing and HVAC trades who initially were wary of the change from lumber now prefer working with steel. As well, the company has found that basement stud-outs are much easier with steel. The benefits LSF provides are in the material handling: non-loadbearing LSF studs are light, take less space, and can be delivered right into the house, where they are within easy reach of the installers. LSF is easily cut, no culling is required, and LSF is installed very quickly. The seven home models at Richmond Hill range from 150 to 180 m^2 (1,628 to 1,918 ft^2). To put the savings into perspective, the 150 m^2 "Augusta" bungalow allows close to $600 savings from LSF compared to wood studs, realized from a combination of material, labour, and a significant reduction in call-backs for drywall-related defects. Savings on the larger homes are proportionally greater. The savings are passed on to home buyers through the purchase price. Another advantage Sifton enjoys with LSF is that the structure can stand roofless for periods, even during damp months, and when a crew returns to complete the construction, the framing is as true as when they left. Ron Leboldus comments that there's no way they could do that with lumber.

The LSF at Richmond Hill is used in conjunction with engineered wood floor and roof systems, the exterior finishes being asphalt shingles, clay brick and vinyl siding, and aluminum fascia, soffits and eaves. Housing Vice President Richard Sifton talks about the move to steel framing: "Sifton Properties has a record of bringing new features to the housing market. We were familiar with steel framing from our work in commercial construction, and were aware of builders successfully using LSF in residential in the States. We saw it as something both new and beneficial from a quality standpoint for the London market, and so we were the first to use it. We're quite prepared to spend money training our own people and the sub-trades in order to arrive at a superior product that benefits the consumer. Obviously, given the number of homes we build - and right now the London market is booming - LSF is working successfully or we wouldn't continue to use it."

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