

Elizabeth Rand-Watkinson

The year of living safely

ELIZABETH RAND-WATKINSON
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It's time for the second annual Reno Adventures virtual holiday party. My theme for 2007 was "Go green," and as I browsed through the 40-plus columns I wrote this year deciding who to invite, two distinct mini-themes emerged: One involved things related to energy conservation, heating and electricity; the other was mould prevention.

The year's columns included some interesting characters, so come on in and let me reintroduce you to a few. You may even pick up some gift ideas.

I'll call the first group you'll meet the Power (and Heat) Rangers. At its core is the energetic threesome gathered around the virtual hearth. (Just so you know, those sparks aren't coming from the fireplace.) There's Dave Walton, director of home ideas at Direct Energy, sharing tips for conserving energy, while Al Davies of EcoOptions Geosolar is talking up in-floor radiant heating. That third fellow is electrical safety guru Peter Marcucci, regulatory affairs vice-president of the Electrical Safety Authority. He's spreading the word about that new Ontario law I wrote about in November. Coming into effect last January, it's designed to protect consumers from unqualified electrical workers who may not perform up to provincial safety standards.

The advice these three have to offer is priceless — consider them gifts of warmth and safety from me to you.

There's Peter Schürmann, head of Redwell Canada Inc., joining in. Is that mistletoe he's holding up? No, it's a Redwell Rondo 500 heater! Peter brought us the Redwell infrared picture heater — a thin, wall-mounted heating panel that plugs into any electrical outlet. It's like a heater cleverly disguised as a framed piece of art or mirror or photograph. The Rondo version isn't available in Canada yet, pending CSA and UL approvals. Peter is just teasing us with it, but stay tuned. In the meantime, there are plenty of other toasty gift ideas on Redwell's website.

I see the engineers from Schneider Electric are eager to join the group by the fire, too. They'll want to talk about the electrical generator panel they developed, in part, in response to the 1998 ice storm that hit parts of Ontario and Quebec. The generator panel can be a real lifesaver in the event of long-term power outages. Anyone planning to upgrade their home's electrical panel would be thrilled to find one of these under the tree.

Rob Green of Green Brothers Construction Ltd., is here, too. Rob introduced me to Schneider Electric's generator panel this spring when he was installing one in a cottage he's renovating. He and Al Davies, who you've already met, were also installing in-floor radiant heating in the cottage. Rob is keen on being green, and covering his reno gave me the opportunity to address green cottaging practices, including protecting a property's shoreline. The folks from Cottage Life magazine were a big help with that column as well. They're the ones lounging in my virtual Muskoka chairs. Check out their website for free publications to tuck into loved ones' stockings.

My second group of guests, the Mould Fighters, represents the various building materials I wrote about. There's Dwight Walker, a technical adviser with Cosella-Dörken, the company that developed Delta-Dry. That's a weather barrier that protects the structural elements of your home from inbound and outbound moisture and from the mould that can result. I'll have to introduce Dwight to the Power (and Heat) Rangers; I'm sure they'll want to hear about how Delta-Dry can reduce energy costs.

Preventing the growth of mould is also of interest to Tomohiko Satou, who is with INAX Corp., Japan's leading ceramics manufacturer. INAX is the brain trust behind those gorgeous "breathing wall" tiles I wrote about. A boon for allergy sufferers, the tiles are called Ecocarát, and they clean the air around them of pet, cooking and other odours. They're also designed to maintain humidity levels in an acceptable range, preventing, again, the growth of mould.

Rounding out the anti-mould contingent is the TV crew loitering in the workshop. It's the gang from Extreme Makeover: Home Edition (in my imaginary world even celebrities clamour for invites to my parties). The show used a product called BluWood in at least one of its projects this year. BluWood is the name given to lumber, trusses and sheathing (your basic above-ground building components) that are treated with what the manufacturer calls a "perfect barrier system," making them impervious to pests such as termites, fungal rot, and, you guessed it, mould.

How's that for three more great gift ideas — Delta-Dry, Ecocarát tiles and BluWood. Among their other attributes, I doubt you'll find a more powerful mould-fighting combo anywhere else.

These are just teasers about what each of my guests brought to the party that was 2007. To find out more, check out the Web and e-mail contact information I've listed. I wish you a warm, safe and mould-free holiday season and new year!

Resources

Contacts for information on:

Conserving energy and reducing energy costs: www.directenergy.com;

Geothermal and in-floor radiant heating: e-mail aldavies@eco-options.ca;

Electrical safety tips: www.pluginsafely.ca;

Schneider Electric generator panel: www.schneider-electric.ca;

Redwell heater: www.redwell.ca, www.bchydro.com and www.hydroquebec.com;

Delta-Dry weather barrier: www.cosella-dorken.com;

Ecocarát wall tiles: www.inax-ecocarát.com, or e-mail tomohiko.satou@i2.inax.co.jp;

BluWood building components: www.bluwoodcanada.com;