

Strong, efficient concrete is catching on

Wider spaces, deeper windowsills and less noise

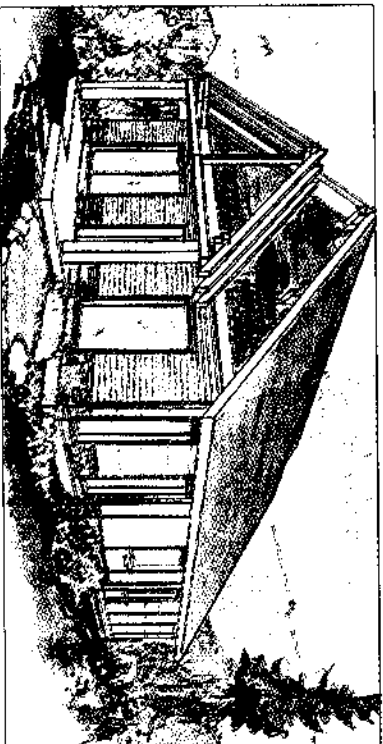
By Judy Swanson
Staff Reporter

Does the idea of living in a concrete home conjure up images of war-time bunkers? Then you better check out this spring's Home and Garden Show at B.C. Place.

The Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association has teamed up with the B.C. Ready-Mixed Concrete Association to present the Concrete Home in the Dome, a 1,275-sq.-ft., demonstration house designed by Vancouver architect Jonathan Ehling.

"When we say 'concrete,' people think bunker but it's not like that at all," says Carolyn Campbell, executive director of B.C. Ready-Mixed.

"ICF (insulated concrete form) homes can look identical to any



A concrete home looks like any other but is more energy efficient.

traditional or contemporary home you may have seen or as original and unique as you want. The only limit is your imagination."

It costs two to five per cent more to build with concrete, which may account for the fact that less than two per cent of homes are built using ICF technology in B.C. But Campbell hopes to change that.

"On average an ICF home is 33

to 40 per cent more energy efficient than a similar wood frame house (the average R value for traditional construction is R14, for 2 x 6 construction — about R20, ICF Homes average between R40 and R50 value)," she said. "It's also a very quick (construction) process. We are putting together the house in nine days, although most builders would take a little

longer."

Campbell likened the process to fitting together hollow Lego pieces made of styrofoam into which rebar-reinforced concrete is poured. The forms become the insulation and the need for a vapour barrier is eliminated.

Campbell said there are several design advantages to using ICF construction.

"Concrete can support larger windows and you can get wider, more open floor spans, which give a homeowner a lot more flexibility in their layout," she said. "Deeper window sills provide great decorating possibilities and the thicker walls create better sound insulation. It's so peaceful, it makes your home more like a sanctuary."

ICF homes enjoy what's called the thermal mass effect — they stay warmer in winter and cooler in summer. "And ICF and radiant heat really cuts down on the amount of dust and allergens inside," says Campbell.

To stress the home's healthy and harmonious qualities, the GVHBA and BCRMCa hired holistic designer, Ann McKay of Faeram Design, who has used decorated concrete floors, countertops and sinks, even furniture and soothing water features to show concrete doesn't have to be grey, cold and uninviting.

Home Show

The spring Home Show runs Wednesday through Sunday.

Besides the concrete house, showgoers will get a chance to meet popular home decorating personalities such as HGTV's *Designer Guys* Steven Sabados and Chris Hyndman, Room Service's Sarah Richardson and Jane Lockhart of *One House, Two Looks* and Genevieve Gorder and Hilda Santos of TLC's *Yarding Spaces*. Admission for adults, \$9.50; 60-plus, \$8.50; kids, \$5 and under 7, free.