

## Canadian houses in China

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One company that has managed to overcome these obstacles is **BPA Group**, a multi-disciplinary engineering firm based in Vancouver with offices in Washington State, California, and Shanghai. The company recently completed work on a 100-unit townhouse development in Dalian, China, and its experience is valuable for companies interested in exporting to China.

In December 2001, Chinese developer Hai Cheong was interested in using steel frame technology for the Dalian project and approached BPA Group. After some negotiation, BPA was hired for the project, which consisted of managing the design and construction

of the townhomes and coordinating the activities of architects, contractors and manufacturers. In Canada, these separate areas often work together through a series of well-defined channels; however, this is not the case in China, where this type of infrastructure does not yet exist.

### Adaptability yields results

In order to tackle the project with any amount of success, BPA had to be willing to embrace the whole process from start to finish. For BPA President John Pao, that was the greatest challenge. "Hai Cheong didn't simply want a supplier," said Pao. "They were looking for someone who could supply, construct, manage and coordinate. They wanted the whole package."

BPA used a material known as light steel frame, or LSF; its basic components are made from thin strips of galvanized sheet steel that are moulded into "C" shapes through a cold forming process. This process is designed to strengthen and stabilize the steel, like folding a sheet of paper.

In recent years, the Chinese government has been working to find alternatives to the traditional brick and block construction that is used in Chinese homes. The demand for Canadian systems—which are considered modern and more energy efficient—has increased as a result.

Nellie Cheng, Senior Trade Consultant for China at Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, notes that Canada has developed a very sophisticated style of housing, which accounts in large part for this popularity. "Through our experience delivering technical seminars and working with people in the Chinese and Canadian markets, it's obvious that there is big potential for Canadian housing products there." In fact,

although BPA's design was framed in steel, many of the finishing components used were wood products. Wall sheathing, wood siding, cabinetry, doors and windows, and hardwood flooring were all imported for use in the project. In addition, BPA procured many products from other sectors including carpeting, vinyl decking, waterproof systems and asphalt and cedar shingles. The success of these products in the Chinese market indicates a strong potential for Canadian exports if companies can introduce a frame construction system that is practical and affordable.

The company did face its share of challenges while in China. Not only did it encounter the inevitable cultural challenges, but it also had to deal with a lack of infrastructure and expectations that were very different from those in North America. Also, there were differences between Canadian and Chinese building regulations in the designs. "In Dalian," notes Pao, "we were trying to introduce new technology without any of the infrastructure that exists in Canada while trying to do it within our budget. That was one of the biggest challenges."

BPA's success has been a testament to the company's adaptability. By working with local professionals, the company has developed a strong base of workers skilled in LSF construction, and the use of Canadian wood products has also helped open up the market in these areas. These small steps have paved the way for LSF in China and have made future projects not only possible, but much easier to coordinate.

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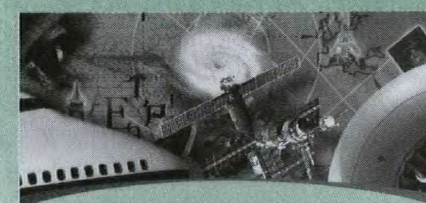
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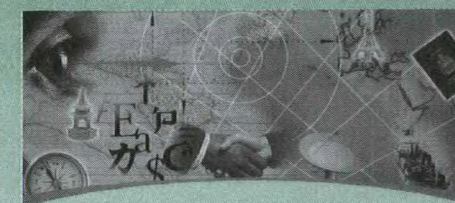


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