



Design for a New World

*By Drew Hubbell
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Can we build structures using natural, renewable materials, structures that harmonize with the land on which they are built? As an intern architect in the late 80s, I became aware of the great amount of natural resources buildings require, there was a need for architects and builders who are sensitive to nature. We need to build energy efficient sustainable structures, considering how each choice we make holds ramifications for the earth. A recent study shows that the U.S. building industry creates roughly half of America's energy consumption and half of its green house gas emissions. Cars and trucks, by comparison, do roughly 1/6th as much damage.

Growing up in a family that put nature's needs on the same level as our own, I developed a deep appreciation for the earth. Our family built small buildings out of local materials found on and made from the land. We learned to recycle and conserve energy from a very young age. These lessons are ingrained in the psyche and a part of my being.

When joining forces with my artist father in 1995, the two studios established the goal of integrating nature-centered art and architecture into environmentally friendly public and private spaces. Our projects now range from public parks around the Pacific Rim, in China, Russia and on Shelter Island in San Diego, to a Quaker church built as an environmental demonstration project. All of our projects, no matter the scope, integrate green principles into the building. Whenever possible, we also introduce art into the building and landscape.

My architectural philosophy is founded upon respect, first of all for materials in the broadest sense, including where they come from, how they are processed and what they become. We are committed to designing buildings that consume minimal nonrenewable resources. Having begun my career as an architect working on projects to restore older buildings and neighborhoods, I also have a great respect for history. That respect is extended to all the ways human beings have discovered and created to live harmoniously on the earth. We need to respect not only our recent predecessors but also our ancient ancestors, some of whose ideas and practices have value for us now as we face resources depleted from more recent building practices. It has been one of our firm's missions to help the city and county building regulatory agencies accept the use of common building materials and practices, such as using straw bales or rammed earth in construction. These natural materials have a broad range of possibilities for building sustainably in this region.

Of course I have the greatest respect for nature, including human nature and the human spirit, including especially all of what remains mysterious to us. I believe my first duty as an architect is to create spaces that celebrate the excitement and mystery of our world in ways respectful of nature's laws, as well as in ways that connect people to nature's nourishing beauty.

Some of the principles our firm brings to our projects are:

- respect for history, nature and the earth
- encouraging smaller homes while integrating indoor/outdoor spaces
- drawing from indigenous peoples and the lessons of history
- orienting to the sun's path - sizing overhangs to block summer sun and allow winter sun to warm the building
- using operable windows open to the breezes and natural ventilation
- building with the terrain rather than leveling it off

- taking advantage of thermal mass to moderate outdoor temperature swings
- using renewable and recyclable materials – we cannot continue to take from the earth as we currently are doing

Winston Churchill once wrote: “We shape our buildings; therefore they shape us.” The buildings we build and the spaces we create affect our psyche more than we are aware. A building with soaring ceilings or no square corners gives us more room to dream and a sense of freedom in our lives. A building with thick walls that reduce the need for using heating and cooling systems can also provide a level of quiet in our homes that can contribute to our sense of peace and rest. Ease of transition between indoors and out, as well as designs that respect light and air, give us a physical contact with the climate and terrain. This can be a comfort to our bodies in ways we’re not consciously aware of and can ease our sense of being at home on the earth, rather than insulated and alienated from it. As our bodies are comforted by a nurturing environment, our minds and spirits are freer to expand into dreams and hopefulness. Having grown up in such a home, creates an ingrown sense that anything is possible in the world. My parents’ organically shaped home interiors, artistic creations and indoor/outdoor arrangements of living space encourage living without boundaries on the imagination.

Together, our studios have found that the practice of listening to the earth and responding to the messages of the land teaches principles to design by, so our building projects can blend with nature’s designs. We hope not only to bring our understanding and values to the clients who choose to work with us, but also to inspire as many people as we can to help take up the cause of everyone living more thoughtfully and harmoniously on our earth.

This is Where We Live

by Pablo Neruda

I am one of those who live
in the middle of the sea and close to the twilight,
a little beyond those stones . . .

From then on I was never
let down by a single wave.
I always found the flavor of the sky
in the water, in the earth,
and the woods and the sea burned together
through the lonely winters . . .

Help us to be more of the earth each day!
Help us to be more of the secured foam,
more the swish of the wave