

Astonishing Architecture

It is becoming increasingly apparent that buildings need to be more durable. They should be more independently productive of the energy and water that they need and they should last much longer than the projected supplies of cheap fossil energy. The buildings we build today may well spend the greater portion of their lives in a completely different resource climate - one based upon renewable energy.

Coldham&Hartman Architects feel that the prudent and responsible action is to make provision for this eventuality. Indeed, there is a great and growing need for examples of buildings that show how this can be achieved. Buildings can be vital places that produce their own energy, collect and cleanse their own water, turn their wastes into nutrients, produce food, filter daylight. They can be healthy, invigorating places in which to live and learn.

A building that is made and maintained according to these principles will attract enormous attention. It will become a regional and national landmark. It will attract interest and support; it will help secure the future of the resident institution.

Community buildings with a curriculum that support environmental education are ideal candidates for such an exemplar. They are centers of community life, visited by young and old, and they leave their strongest impressions on those young lives that are most likely to be affected by the issues they seek to highlight.

Buildings like this are wonderful educational tools, not only for students, but also for the world around. The operations of such a building could become embedded in the curriculum. Students could use the building as a classroom, a laboratory, a canvas, and a workshop.

Making and maintaining such a building is no easy task. It requires innovation at many levels, and it requires a thoroughly integrated design and construction effort. Operating and maintaining such a building requires committed people to tend the operations that produce energy, collect and filter water, and cycle nutrients.

What usually passes for a "sustainable building" is a pastiche of specific attributes applied to an essentially conventionally conceived structure - some solar collectors, some use of recycled materials, some low-tox finishes, etc. Coldham Architects attempts to find a fuller architectural expression of "greenness" than is typically conveyed. We are looking for the essential qualities and a compelling architectural expression of a new class of "astonishing buildings".