

## Crisis and opportunity: Sustainable architecture

IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE CHINESE symbol for "crisis" happens to be the same symbol for "opportunity," an apparent oxymoron as much as "sustainable architecture" seems to be. Yet both of these are honest terms like

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*Structural integrity*

other oxymorons: "jumbo shrimp," "round ice cubes," "civil war" and parking on a driveway, yet driving on a parkway. And, like other oxymorons, they make you think with a touch of fun. Our current environmental crisis is very real, and discussion of it can make a person disconsolate. For the creative individual, however, it is an opportunity for creative solutions. Make no mistake: We are at a critical point in history in regard to how we respond to environmental problems, and we must start to act now.

The architecture profession is starting to realize the harm it can do to the planet and is coming up with creative ideas to lessen or eliminate that harm. Sustainable architecture is not that difficult to define. Basically "sustainability" focuses on the environment, social equality, and economics. One can see how this is drastically different from the "green" movement of the Sixties and Seventies. Today's movement has matured. It is realizing that working with industry, not just always against it, and making a profit are also vital to saving the planet. Today's sustainable architects are being careful not to elevate environmental factors too far above cultural, social or aesthetic concerns. Integrating these factors gives us a "style" with real and honest layers worth exploring.

The great architect Le Corbusier said, "Our own epoch is determining, day by day, its own style." What is our epoch's own style? Some signs of an emerging style are seen in principles emerging in our world based on sustainability:

- Doing more with less
- Celebrating place
- Integration of old and new
- Appropriateness of form and technology
- Human focus
- Economics and ecology related

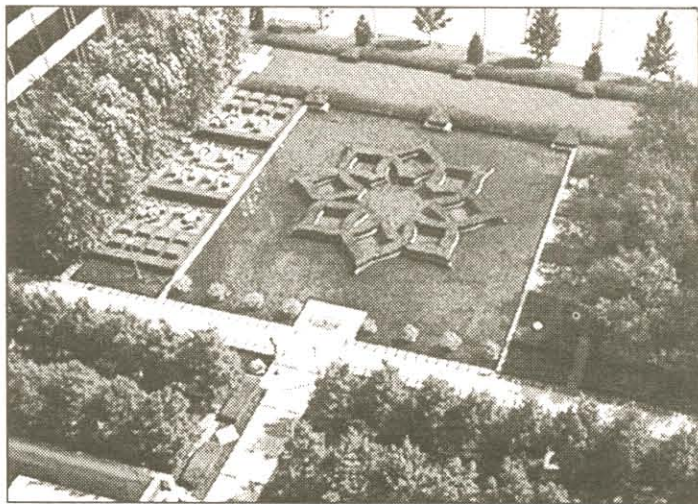
These trends are seen in today's art, automobile design, product design, manufacturing and economics. That's right – economics. An economy is a kind of ecology; it thrives when it is diverse, balanced and well adapted to the local habitat. It is being realized that ecological, sociological and economic deterioration go hand in hand. European banks and insurance companies have constructed some of the "greenest" buildings on the planet. What does that tell you? About sustainable business management, Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia, said, "Every time we've done the right thing, it's ended up making us more money."

In order for architecture to do "the right thing," we have to come up with some sound and sustainable design principles.

The most basic, but often overlooked, principle is to use common-sense devices derived from the local vernacular. Where are the sun and wind coming from? Very important here in Oklahoma! By looking to the historical vernacular, one does not have to be "retro" or just copy what has already been done. The best sustainable projects in the world use traditional principles and current technology to construct them.

Embracing technology is another principle. Today we have more efficient appliances and light bulbs, more efficient glazing and insulation, and more advanced solar, wind and geothermal energy than ever before. Using local materials is valuable. The materials came from this place and belong to it; they can endure our climate. The money spent on them will be circulated back in our local economy.

Here is what you can do to promote sustainability: Pick one thing and do it now. There is so much involved in sustainable design that it can seem overwhelming. Relax – there is no such thing as a 100 percent sustainable building in the world, unless you don't mind a cave-



This aerial photo shows the park constructed on top of the parking garage for the Centex Buildings in Dallas.

to live and work in. Find one aspect of your project, learn about it and implement it. With each step you will know that much more. You do not need to be an expert to make an impact. Remember this adage: If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito.

Don't just meet the minimum requirements. Have fun and enhance the design based on environmental factors. ■

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*The Centex Buildings in Dallas, developed by Harwood-Pacific have the highest Energy Star rating in the country.*

