Leaving a Legacy

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Beyond Organic Architecture to Architecture as an Organism

If only we hadn't industrialized. It was all going swimmingly until then; small populations building homes and buildings of brick, stone and wood and living well within our natural means. The necessities of industrialization and modernism left us with factories, schools, and housing projects that banished the sun and all forms of natural life; left us irritable and twitching with ADD in our florescent-lit offices, or allergy ridden with air conditioning mould. Modern buildings are voracious consumers of our time, money and energy. Along with the copious appliances that make up the inner-workings, they have utilized fossil fuels to the point of pollution, climate change and holes in our ozone layer. This is their legacy.

Frank Lloyd Wright first coined the phrase 'organic architecture' to describe architecture emulating nature. Buildings so similar to their surroundings, that they would blur the lines between where the buildings ended and nature began; a refreshing conceptual take on design that was revolutionary for its time. More than a curve ball to the straight lines and the behemoths that characterized modernism, Wright's return to nature signified a shift in the architectural zeitgeist. These desires to return to nature must reach beyond the aesthetic if they are to change the legacy we leave to future generations. Our legacy will be buildings, not emulating natural organisms, but *as* natural organisms. Buildings which transcend the mere shell and create spaces that are healthy, that add to the experience of our lives and that take the human spirit into account.

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The Secret Lifecycles of Green Buildings

Germination: The concept of buildings as an organism must have the support of the client and architect. Architects must balance functionality, design and budget with environmental concerns. The architect has the responsibility of informing their client of the latest developments in green architecture and sustainable building design. This will encourage inspiration and grow ideas.

Saplings: The building uses environmentally responsible building practices. Natural features are left intact where possible; slopes provide shelter and rainwater collection opportunities, trees provide windbreaks and natural shading. Position the building to get the most sun in the same way plants grow to harvest. Organic and recycled materials reduce costs and prevent pollution. Portable solar units power building sites.

Flowers: Green buildings have roots too. They use geothermal heating systems to heat and cool air. Solar PV panels convert the sun's energy to create hospitable environments for its inhabitants. Fresh air is funnelled through louvers to regulate temperatures and give occupants a breath of fresh air. The building produces all of the energy it needs. It harvests rainwater and stores it for re-use. Thermal mass structures absorb the sun's heat during the day and radiate it at night. The building is sheathed in IMFs or ICFs to protect its external integrity and insulate it from the elements.

Seeds: Excess energy is sent to the grid for use by industry. Gardens and green roofs create green spaces for people and animals. Children are taught in green schools and live in green homes and they are healthier, happier.

Death: The building is recycled. Materials are used to construct other buildings, recycled or composted.

What legacy will you leave for future generations? Every new building is contributing to the legacy that we leave to future generations. Will it be admired for its functionality, its design, its positive contribution to the environment, or all of the above or will our legacy be one of greed and ruin that leaves future generations with a pilfered planet in the name of budgetary constraints?