



designers are *visionaries*



POWER  
OF DESIGN  
2008

Interior designers are leading the green revolution beyond the built environment by changing the behaviors and mindsets of clients. *By David Whitemyer*

Many visitors to the Wild Center, a natural history museum set in New York's Adirondack Mountains, return home feeling empowered to "go green." But that likely has more to do with the design of the center than the exhibits it houses.

Designed by St. Louis-based interior design and architecture firm HOK, in conjunction with the Office of Charles P. Reay, also in St. Louis, the Silver LEED-certified facility teaches museum-goers about energy conservation and water collection by incorporating the building's green features into the exhibit experience through educational tours and brochures. "It was all quite unintentional," says Mary Ann Lazarus, AIA, LEED AP, HOK's Sustainable Design Director. "Visitors found the sustainable architecture so fascinating that the museum incorporated it into its educational program."

Interior designers are in a unique position: They have both the know-how and the medium to promote action toward a greener world. Many forward-thinking designers aren't satisfied with simply specifying eco-friendly materials and furnishings. They're leading the green movement by providing sustainable spaces and teaching end-users how to get the most out of them. They're influencing and encouraging the people who live in, work in and visit these spaces to tread a bit more lightly on the earth.

"We introduce the topic of sustainability to clients, and we hope to engage them in a way that connects to their vision and values," Lazarus says. "A lot of clients become converts."

Most people want to act in ways that help the environment but lack the information needed to take those first simple steps. Interior designers can incorporate these lessons into the spaces they create.

At the Wild Center, for example, visitors are hungry for information about the building, including the 40-kilowatt photovoltaic array that provides 10 percent of the museum's power, the storm water that's collected and reused, and the building's materials, many of which are recycled and come from local resources and manufacturers. Visitors want to know what they can do with their own homes, such as installing rain barrels and compact fluorescent bulbs, Lazarus says.

Stephanie Ratcliffe, Executive Director of the Wild Center, explains that, to fill that curiosity, the museum gives tours of the building and, beginning this June, will provide brochures about its green features and add interpretive graphic panels around the facility.

Even further, the Wild Center employees, inspired by the design of their new building, have reached out to the area's farming community and launched a program called "Featured Farmer." The program draws nearby residents

to the museum on weekends to buy local food and watch educational demonstrations about where that food comes from. "We know that this is practicing what we're preaching," says Ratcliffe.

#### LIVING BY DESIGN

Like HOK, Houston-based Kirksey doesn't simply build green; the interior design and architecture firm lives it. In a lead-by-example effort, it has issued to the Texas community the "KirkseyCC," a carbon copy challenge. In the challenge, Kirksey asks its neighbors – all those who live and work in the area – to do what the firm itself has already done: reduce their energy-consumption footprint by taking small steps, such as initiating an office carpool program or adjusting home and office thermostats. "We wanted to give people information about ways that they can make a difference," says Brian Malarkey, IIDA, AIA, Executive Vice President of Kirksey. Office employees or building tenants may not have the power to develop a sustainable facility, "but there are still things that they can do," he says.

Since 1987, long before "green" became widespread, Kirksey has planted trees throughout Houston in lieu of sending holiday gifts to clients and consultants. To date, almost 7,000 trees have been placed in the ground, thanks to Kirksey's employees and leadership. The firm has also authored a comprehensive "Guide to a Green Facility," which is written for non-design professionals. Kirksey provides the guide both on its Web site and directly to clients. "We realize there are a lot of green issues that aren't architecture-related, like recycling, cleaning, office equipment and appliances, and transportation," Malarkey says.

At both Kirksey and HOK, employees show clients and local residents that true sustainability requires some

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personal action. Many HOK employees bike to work; others have sold their cars and moved to the city. The company encourages its staff to bring HOK reusable lunch sacks to promote minimizing waste. Kirksey employees are rewarded with a free lunch for every five days that they carpool.

#### **'LEEDING' THE WAY**

Malarkey, Director of Kirksey's EcoServices division, credits the USGBC LEED rating system for helping push sustainability beyond building design and into end-user practices. For example, LEED credits are given for encouraging alternative transportation. When Kirksey designed corporate offices for Horizon Wind Energy and the American Heart Association, both in Houston, it provided bike racks and showers, and even decreased the number of parking spots allocated to employees. "What we were able to do," Malarkey says, "was enhance the behavior and beliefs they already had."

HOK recently completed Latin America's first LEED Gold-certified building, the HSBC Bank Headquarters Tower in Mexico City. In addition to incorporating a green roof, onsite graywater treatment plant, low-VOC carpeting and GreenGuard-certified furniture, the team used local materials and resources during construction, and included bike racks for employees to encourage behavioral changes.

LEED credits are also awarded for innovation, which can be as simple as incorporating sustainability education through brochures, educational panels or public tours. Designed by Kansas City, Mo.-based BNIM Architects, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' LEED Platinum-certified Lewis and Clark State Office Building in Jefferson City takes education to

a new level. It showcases, rather than hides, the building's green technologies and systems as part of the design. Features such as the 50,000-gallon rainwater collection cistern and the 168 photovoltaic panels are incorporated into the design for all to see. Native wood and stones that are recognizable to the employees and visitors are used.

David Immenschuh, FIIDA, Principal of Architectural Interiors at BNIM, says the company is focused on gathering post-occupancy data on more than just building performance. "We're checking in to see if people are using the bike racks or shutting down their computers at night," he says. Earlier this year, a building performance analysis showed a 7.5 percent decrease in absenteeism for DNR employees working in the building.

It's one thing to construct energy-efficient homes and offices. But to ensure the carbon-neutral effort stays on track, those who use these spaces must continue living sustainably after the interior designers, architects and contractors leave the building. "[Designers] have shared values about sustainability, and we want to encourage those values in our clients," Immenschuh says. ■