



From Bauhaus to Eco-House: A History of Ecological Design

By Peder Anker

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Global warming and concerns about sustainability recently have pushed ecological design to the forefront of architectural study and debate. As Peder Anker explains in *From Bauhaus to Ecohouse*, despite claims of novelty, debates about environmentally sensitive architecture have been ongoing for nearly a century. By exploring key moments of inspiration between designers and ecologists from the Bauhaus projects of the interwar period to the eco-arks of the 1980s, Anker traces the historical intersection of architecture and ecological science and assesses how both remain intertwined philosophically and pragmatically within the still-evolving field of ecological design.

The idea that science could improve human life attracted architects and designers who looked to the science of ecology to better their methodologies. Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus school, taught that designed form should follow the laws of nature in order to function effectively. With the Bauhaus movement, ecology and design merged and laid the foundation of modernist architecture.

Anker discusses in detail how the former faculty members of the Bauhaus school -- including László Maholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer -- left Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s and engaged with ecologists during their "London period" and in the U.S. A subsequent generation of students and admirers of Bauhaus, such as Richard Buckminster Fuller and Ian McHarg, picked up their program, and -- under the general banner of merging art and science in the design process -- Bauhaus-minded architects began to think ecologically while some ecologists lent their ideas to design.

Anker charts complicated currents of ecological design thought spanning pre-- and post--World War II and through the cold war, including pivotal changes such as the emergence of space exploration and new theories on closed-system living in space capsules, space stations, and planetary colonies. Space ecology, Anker explains, inspired leading landscape designers of the 1970s, who used the imagined life of astronauts as a model for how humans should live in harmony with nature. Theories of how to design for extraterrestrial living impacted design and ecological thinking for earth-based living as well, as evidenced in Disney's

Spaceship Earth attraction as well as in the Biosphere 2 experiments in Arizona in the early 1990s.

Illuminating important connections between theories about the relationship between humans and the built environment, Anker's provocative study provides new insight into a critical period in the evolution of environmental awareness.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The growing public profile of climate change concerns have brought ecologically-minded programs like LEED to the forefront of today's building design industry, but New York University science historian Anker claims, in this 50-year survey, that design has long been linked to ecology and science. The Bauhaus school began this interchange in the 1930s, "a period in which many biologists turned their attention to avant-garde modernist architecture... as a way of improving social health and the environment" while designers looked to biology: "true functionalism to them was a matter of designing according to the laws of nature." Anker profiles designers including Gropius, Bayer, and Fuller, and discusses attempts to integrate design and nature in projects like the London Zoo, Fuller's "4D Tower House," Biosphere 2, and spacecraft. Disappointingly, Anker's history ends in the 1980s, appended with some generalizations about the present (as well as a glossary and thorough references). A lack of illustration will also limit this detailed (though didactic) volume's appeal to students and professionals.

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About the Author

Peder Anker is an associate professor of the history of science at the Gallatin School of Individualized Study and the Environmental Studies Program at New York University. He is also the author of *Imperial Ecology*, *Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895--1945*.

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