

## Emerging Professionals Must Embrace Sustainable Design

by Mark Giessen

*Mark Giessen, a project manager with Cubellis Ecoplan, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., and current ARE candidate, makes the case that emerging professionals, in their first few years of dealing with the gap that exists between architecture education and professional practice, need to find ways to have a positive impact on society. For many, sustainable design may offer just such a pathway. Young architects today are starting their careers at a time when the environment seems to have made its way onto the radar of the American people, and it is up to them, Giessen says, to take charge and guarantee that the profession remains in the forefront of the environmental movement.*

One of the first challenges emerging professionals face when entering the workforce is dealing with the gap that exists between architecture education and professional practice. We quickly

find that “the real world” often is more stair details and shop drawings than design charrettes or model-making. Gradually, we navigate through practice, often working in various offices on various project types trying to get a feel for the “career of architecture.” Within a couple of years, we start to find our strengths and weakness but, more importantly, we learn what about the profession really excites us.

In this discovery process, many of us search for ways to have a positive impact on society, whether as an active presence in the AIA or donating time to organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. The root of our education teaches us the local and global impact architects and the buildings we design can have on the world around us. This is why many architects have geared their practice toward sustainable design. From energy use and the filling of landfills to the overall physical and mental health of the building oc-



cupants, architects are chiefly responsible for how well—or not so well—a building functions.

### Increasingly, clients want sustainable design

More and more, sustainable design is becoming accepted practice. This is as it should be, and although one day sustainable design will be integrated throughout college curriculums as well as city ordinances, green design still remains the exception rather than the rule. In fact, even within the architecture community it is still met with some resistance. Our sustainable predecessors were labeled as “tree huggers,” and ours is the first generation of designers who grew up being taught the importance of energy conservation. As young architects, we are starting our careers at a time when the environment seems to have made its way onto the radar of the American people. With the focus on high



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gas prices and the war in the Iraq, people are starting to comprehend how energy use can have a direct effect on everyday life. Now, more than ever, architects who champion green design stand a better chance of being taken seriously when discussing these issues with their clients.

Public attention being paid to the environment only reinforces the arguments that many architects have been making for years: People and the buildings they live in need to have less of a negative impact on the world around them. As architects, we have a unique opportunity and a significant role in areas such as energy conservation, use of renewable and recyclable materials, health and safety of building occupants—and this just scratches the surface.

### Young architects are part of the solution

Many architects are designing buildings that not only function efficiently but are beautifully designed by following rules established by the environment around us. Although this isn't how I approached design problems in school or even in my first

few years of work, I've come to realize that sustainable design concepts are tangible. They can provide answers to difficult design questions. More importantly, green designs have a social conscience and can be quantifiably measured in terms of impact on the environment.

I firmly believe that one day all design will be environmentally conscious design. The generations before us laid the foundations of sustainable design, and it is the responsibility of the young professionals to take charge and guarantee that our profession remains in the forefront of the environmental movement. When we look back, sustainable design may be what defines this generation of architects. I look forward to being a part of it.

### Reference

Mark Giessen is a senior project manager at Cubellis Ecoplan, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., and currently is sitting for his architecture license exam. He has contributed numerous articles to his firm's green newsletter and is active in the Cubellis Sustainability Committee. He can be reached at [mgiessen@cubellis.com](mailto:mgiessen@cubellis.com).

This week, members of the YAF are joining other design professionals and public officials for *Livable Communities: Walking, Working, Water* September 14–17 in Seattle to explore the intersecting spheres of community and environment through design.

