


(Green) House in the Hamptons

by Joey Roth, Brooklyn, USA on 07. 4.07

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Project Greenhouse, which we covered at Sundance a few month ago, has opened up shop in the Hamptons, New York's home for vacation homes. Designed by architect Edvin Karl Stromsten to accent a secluded stretch of forest he already owned, the house was light, geometric, and nonthreatening; definitely within the realm of "friendly modernism" that characterizes many new houses built in summer colonies. The green engineering that informed much of the design, and the sponsorship it attracted, was far from standard however.

Although it seemed to be designed for warm summer vacation weather, the house uses a geothermal heating system and a lot of concrete in the construction. This will absorb heat during the day and release it gradually at night. Two of the main walls also use underground earth sheltering to take advantage of the thermal mass afforded by the ground itself, and the roof is paved in solar panels to provide electricity. The house's orientation itself also contributes to its efficiency: windows face south (and there are a lot of them) to capture the winter sun, while the other sides of the house are designed to reflect direct sunlight in the summer, avoiding unnecessary heating.

Walking down the small path from the road, the lines of natural concrete and open windows hanging behind the trees reminded me of traditional Japanese garden designs that reveal and hide landscape features to structure a narrative along the path. In another nod to this traditional layout, the architect left the mound of earth that was moved to create space for the swimming pool in place and allowed it to be colonized by local grasses, suggesting a distant hill if viewed from inside the veranda. While the greenest second home is no second home, a dwelling that the owner isn't tied to year-round leaves more room for experimentation.

The house's rustic setting and quiet design seemed a bit mismatched to a celebration of the luxurious green lifestyle and patterns of consumption, but I was glad to see genuinely green companies filling niches like alcohol ([Vodka 360](#) and [Cuca Fresca Cachaca](#)) and [air travel](#). I was especially interested in [eConscious Market](#), an online marketplace that sells sustainable goods by way of a "for-benefit" business model. Based partially on founder Mathew Gearson's understanding of Buddhism, the company will funnel half of all net profits to nonprofit organizations chosen by customers. I look forward to seeing how this works out once the site launches.

Organizer Corrin Arasa filled each room with modern eco-furniture, further showing that the “green” aesthetic has grown beyond earth tones and hemp fibers. Rattan, laminated bamboo, and organic upholstery fabrics were all well-represented. While the furniture was pleasing and went well with the space, it wasn't as interestingly designed as the pieces at the cutting-edge of non-eco furniture. I hope that designers will stop using their work's sustainability as a crutch, and green will simply become the standard, with brilliant design carrying the product. Getting to that point is a process though, and the furniture on display was definitely pointing in the right direction.

The GreenHouse will also become Josh May's home during July as he quits smoking, starts biking everywhere, and tries to reduce his carbon footprint to zero, making himself into the “Invisible Man”. Look for [Olivia Zelaski's](#) coverage of his mis-adventures on the path to green this month on TH.