

HAS SUSTAINABLE ARCHITECTURE BECOME A STAPLE IN AMERICAN DESIGN, OR WILL IT BE A TREND THAT DIES OUT EVENTUALLY?

ARCHITECTS TIMOTHY KERNER AND SCOTT WEST DISCUSS JUST HOW FAR THE GREEN MOVEMENT HAS PERMEATED THEIR MARKETS, AND WHETHER THE STRIVE FOR SUSTAINABILITY IS COMMONPLACE OR TRANSIENT

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owns both an architecture studio and a development company, working in concert to make green design more prominent in Atlanta.

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is a LEED-certified architect who believes that buildings should be designed to endure, incorporating quality craftsmanship and materials.

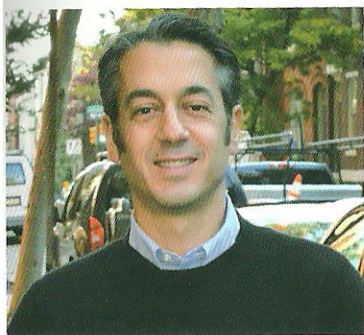
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“TRUE SUSTAINABILITY IS INEVITABLE. ... IF WE VALUE OUR RESOURCES—AND HOW COULD WE NOT?—WE WILL FIND A WAY TO SUSTAIN THEM.”

TIMOTHY KERNER, AS TOLD TO FREDERICK JERANT

BAMBOO SCREENS

For a Philadelphia condo's interiors, Kerner incorporated bamboo plywood screens to accent and divide spaces. One screen (in the far corner) has a television screen built in.



ABOUT TIMOTHY KERNER / Timothy Kerner, AIA LEED PA, is principal of Terra Studio LLC, an architecture and interior-design firm in Philadelphia. For more than 20 years, his designs have supported meaningful relations between people, places, and the environment. Kerner's work spans residential, commercial, and institutional projects for both private and public clients, including the National Park Service, the National Gallery of Arts, and the Curtis Institute of Music. He has taught design studios at Philadelphia and Temple Universities and holds master's degrees in architecture and city planning from the University of Pennsylvania.

I think it depends on how you apply the term “sustainable.” For some companies, the term is now being used as a marketing strategy. For example, consider a plywood chair, held together by glue. If the glue has low VOCs, the chair could be marketed as a “sustainable” product. But if it's cheaply built and falls apart in a few years, you'll have to replace it. And that's the opposite of sustainable. On the other hand, if it's made from quality materials that will last over time, it would be sustainable.

Part of the problem is that there's no set definition of the term. It's kind of like “organic food.” Once the idea caught on with major food producers, the FDA stepped in and created a definition. There were positive and negative consequences. Organic growers must now comply with government standards, but the definition excludes certain valid approaches—because they don't comply.

But I think true sustainability is inevitable—we need to accept that the planet does, indeed, have certain limited resources and act accordingly. Otherwise, they will be lost. A hundred years ago, there was little regard for the impact of our actions on the environment, which seemed limitless. New England's native forests were completely destroyed by clear-cutting. Forests have been regrown in limited areas but they will require responsible management to endure. If we value our own resources—and how could we not?—we will find a way to sustain them.

And we're making progress in that direction. One trend I see is a resurgence of urban living. The suburbs have been expanding over the past 60 years in response to people's desire to get “closer to nature,” but this expansion actually harms nature, as well as agricultural areas. Staying urban allows more “nature” to exist. And renovation of existing buildings is more sustainable, by definition, than new construction, especially when using appropriate materials. For example, Terra Studio recently worked with the construction firm Joseph A. Cairone, Inc. to renovate a condominium in the Murano, a high-rise in Center City Philadelphia. One of the sustainable aspects of the design is the use of bamboo as a thematic element; it's used for flooring and for gridded panels that serve various functions throughout the home. And because bamboo is such a fast-growing plant, it renews itself quickly and can be considered a sustainable resource. >



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Joseph A. Cairone, Inc. expresses their gratitude to the D'Orazio residence of the Murano Condominium for selecting them to take part in the renovations and their design winning project. We extremely valued being part of a team with not only the designer and architect, but the Murano itself. The Murano is a luxuriously modern new condominium in Philadelphia that boasts unique floor plans, striking views and the convenience of Center City living.

OVERLOOKING CENTER CITY
Located in the Murano Condominium building in Center City, Philadelphia, this living space features not only an excellent view, but custom-fabricated pieces by Kerner, including the wood bench pictured here.

Historic preservation is another route to increasing people's awareness of sustainability. It's difficult to be in Philadelphia's Rittenhouse district—with buildings that date as far back as the 1800s—and not be impressed by the sense of history and endurance. But the district is not a museum. It is a vibrant urban area with a diverse mix of old and new buildings that support and enrich contemporary life.

Part of our philosophy is that buildings should endure, and I find that people are recognizing the long-term value of quality craftsmanship and materials versus the costs of replacing everything in 10 years.

The biggest push for sustainability needs to come from the market itself. When consumers really appreciate the value of a durable, well-made product—whether it's furniture, a building or anything else—and purchase accordingly, manufacturers will respond.

Some retailers have already responded. There's a Philadelphia store called Minima that supplied much of the furniture we used in the Murano residence. The store focuses on modern furniture with clean lines. The designs are classic, not "faddish," meaning they will still be considered well designed in the future. The store also carries high-quality items from local craftsmen. The point is that Minima's goods will be enjoyed for many years. And that plays into a few key concepts of true sustainability—enduring materials, quality craftsmanship, and good design. ●



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