

IIDA/Metropolis

SMART ENVIRONMENTS AWARDS

*Design Excellence
Human Health and Well-Being
Sustainability*



*Congratulations
to the six
winning firms*

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Design from the Inside Out

You are about to see a snapshot of twenty-first-century interiors: they are kind to their occupants and the earth equally. In addition to being beautiful, they represent a series of sophisticated decisions that involve a strong relationship to the architecture that defines them, as well as careful choices of materials and furnishings. Winners of the inaugural IIDA/Metropolis Smart Environments Awards in 2006, these six projects seamlessly connect many interrelated design decisions—everything from responsible building sites to nontoxic finishes. Individually these projects tell an incomplete story; but taken together they reveal the essential and inevitable connections between the outside and the inside worlds. Sunlight in our rooms is as important to our well-being as it is outdoors, and so is clean air. Interior design centered on these basic human needs is ultimately smart design. —SUSAN S. SZENASY
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Regionalism

CCS Architecture/Lettüs Café Organic

by Karen E. Steen

For a Slow Food restaurant in San Francisco, Cass Calder Smith deploys recycled materials for durability with a popular appeal.

Strips of hickory reclaimed from a barn in Illinois line the ceiling and walls of Lettüs, in San Francisco's Marina district (below). Amy Fritz designed the wall-mounted menus, as well as the logo displayed on the storefront's canvas awning (opposite).

Organic Barn Raising



"Instead of being pretentious or formal, we said, 'It's a farm. Come eat at our table,'" Lewis says.

For anyone willing to pay a premium, it's relatively easy to embrace an environmentally sustainable way of life in San Francisco. There are biodiesel fuel stations, organic markets, even holistic pet stores. But Mark Lewis and Matthew Guelke are working toward a day when everyone will live this way—not just those with the means. Their organic café, Lettüs, aims to bridge the gap between local-ingredient guru Alice Waters and McDonald's founder Ray Kroc.

Under the guidance of executive chef Sascha Weiss, Lettüs's Asian-influenced menu is almost entirely organic and relies heavily on what is available from local farms, dairies, and ranches. Weiss, Lewis, and Guelke consider themselves members of the Slow Food movement, which advocates knowing where your food comes from and supporting traditional and sustainable farming practices. But Lettüs does not aim to create more fetishism in the already food-centric Bay Area. "Instead of being pretentious or formal, we said, 'It's a farm. Come eat at our table,'" Lewis says. He envisions a near future when organic cafés are as prolific as fast-food chains. "That's how we'll change the way the world eats," he says. "It's not by having one great restaurant—it's by having one on every block."

The two owners wanted their philosophy to permeate every aspect of the project, including the architecture. In addition to following green principles, the design would need to feel casual and accessible in order to make eating there an everyday occasion. And it would be modern, to reach beyond the earthy-crunchy crowd and lure in a new kind of customer. "The earthier places are great, but a lot of their clientele already eats this way," Guelke says. "We wanted to make a place that caters more to the mainstream, where people come in because of the design of the space and the kinds of dishes we're offering."

The firm they chose to create that environment—CCS Architecture, founded by Cass Calder Smith—was a rare blend of all these requirements. Smith grew up on a commune near Santa Cruz and studied solar energy in the 1980s, but today he is best known for crisp Modernist dining environments such as Restaurant LuLu, in San Francisco, and the Wild Goose, on Lake Tahoe. Lewis and Guelke particularly liked the feel of the cafés Smith designed in San Francisco's recently renovated Ferry Building Marketplace, a former ferry terminal turned high-end farmers' market. "When we said to Cass that we wanted to be the waiting room of a Finnish sauna set in a Tokyo airport, he got it," Lewis says.

But holding the design to the high green standards of Weiss's food proved difficult. Smith, who has built a number of green residences, says sustainable restaurants are much more challenging. "Restaurants



ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS
Paladino: We always ask the question, How green can we make the project within the current budget and schedule? We don't spend a lot of time and energy on trying to answer. How much extra money will it cost? We spend the time and energy on, How green can we get it given the rules of the project as they've stated by the owner?

Below: Chairs by Denver-based Shafer Commercial Seating, bench seats by West Coast Industries, and strips inserted into the walls to serve as bench backs are all upholstered with wool fabric from Maharam. Tabletops by Lawrence Gandsey use the same hickory as the walls and ceilings. Right: While the ingredients for Lettüs's dishes are almost all locally sourced, that is not the case with many of the materials used for the interior.

really wear out fast," he says. "Most sustainable materials are not strong enough for the impact and friction of heavy use." And since Lewis and Guelke wanted to keep their food affordable, the budget was limited. In fact their first design decision was to choose an existing space that had been a French bakery before and keep the kitchen intact. As Smith points out, this is recycling on a grand scale, and in some ways it's greener and less wasteful than doing all new construction with sustainable materials.

Instead of searching high and low for a broad palette of green materials, Smith chose one wood for almost everything: walls, ceilings, tabletops, shelving—even the bathroom counter. "When you're doing organic food, I think a wooden background is as important as the plate," Smith says. "It creates this feeling



"Hickory is a really beautiful wood, and it's even better when it's this recycled version—it's more alive as far as grain and color and range."

that's warm and familiar—it's kind of domestic." Obviously the lumber could not be freshly harvested from an endangered forest. Instead Smith chose hickory reclaimed from a 186-year-old barn in Gilson, Illinois and acquired by Restoration Timber. "Hickory is a really beautiful wood," he says, "and it's even better when it's this recycled version—it's more alive as far as grain and color and range."

To reflect the Slow Food movement's attention to where food comes from, Lewis and Guelke wanted natural fabrics and a stone-like floor. CCS chose wool upholstery from Maharam in a mossy green. The fabric is 100 percent natural and will not off-gas toxic chemicals into the air—an environmental complement to Weiss's organic food. The floor is covered with all-natural tiles from Royal Mosa, a company that recaptures and recycles all of its waste, from pigments to gas particulates. The tiles themselves are recyclable and do not emit toxins.

Lettüs opened in December 2005, and if the café's current success is any indication, San Franciscans may be seeing more locations in the future. The recipe of affordable organic food in a casual upscale environment may even have changed the way some locals eat. "We wanted a place where people could eat four or five days a week—and it's worked," Guelke says, gesturing toward a customer reading the paper over a late lunch. "That woman over there has been in twice today."

"We like to think of our customers as renewable and sustainable," Lewis quips. "We want to keep them coming back."

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Regionalism: Lettüs Café Organic

Shadows of Green

KEY TO SHADING
More sustainable (darker green) | Less sustainable (lighter green)

THE FOOD
Chef Sascha Weiss estimates that 98 percent of his ingredients are organic, and most of his fresh foodstuffs come from nearby farms and ranches. He builds his menu around seasonal produce available locally. When he can't find completely organic items, Weiss makes his own: Lettüs's pastries, sorbets, and ice creams are prepared in house.

THE WOOD
Almost all of the wood used in the design is hickory from a barn built in 1820. Reclaiming lumber allows architects to get the look of wood without the guilt of adding to deforestation. But barns rarely fall down in a convenient zip code. The hickory, acquired by San Francisco's Restoration Timber, had to travel from Gilson, Illinois.

THE KITCHEN
To keep their budget down, Lewis and Guelke hung Lettüs's shingle in a former French bakery and retained the existing kitchen rather than designing a new one. As a result they recycled several tons of building materials and equipment simply by reusing them. The ranges, ovens, and refrigerators are not necessarily green, but they're not in a landfill either.

THE PACKAGING
Many Lettüs customers order take-out meals, or select prepackaged items from a refrigerated display. Mindful of waste, owners Mark Lewis and Matthew Guelke chose compostable containers made from Nebraska-grown corn, and cutlery fashioned from potatoes. The "grab and go" clamshells biodegrade in 45 days, and the to-go cutlery decomposes in two months.

THE FLOORS
The floor is covered in tiles from Royal Mosa, a company that claims zero waste. Any broken tiles are ground up and returned to clay; even particulates from the kilns are captured and reused. Royal Mosa is based in the Netherlands, so until U.S. manufacturers adopt the company's methods, American architects are stuck sourcing from afar.