

Banff's Eco-Courtyard

The Bison Courtyard development in Banff Alberta is more than a "green" building: its "enlightened merchants" have been encouraged to engage in numerous experiments in eco-economics.

Read Time: 2 minutes

October 23, 2007, 6:00 AM PDT

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"An elegant, \$10-million multi-use complex, [Bison Courtyard] forms a horseshoe of blond wood, local limestone and triple-paned glass, with notches carefully inserted in its roofline to provide postcard views of the area's most prominent peaks. The courtyard also has a large garden of native plants fed by rainwater (which also flushes the building's toilets) and indigenous greenery on flat sections of the roof that both improve insulation and create a sanctuary for the valley's natural habitat.

All told, 92 per cent of the building materials cleared to make way for Bison Courtyard were diverted from landfill, including a significant portion repurposed on-site. This includes one of the two namesake 6,000-year-old bison skulls found during the excavation of the underground parking lot, which greets visitors from a display case in the lobby (the other now resides in Banff's Buffalo Nations Luxton Museum). The complex's energy demand is about 70 per cent less than a conventional building Arctos & Bird manages elsewhere in town.

This, though, is increasingly standard-issue stuff in the green building game, and efficiency, by itself, doesn't demonstrate the full scope of sustainability's promise. What is truly remarkable about Bison Courtyard is its attention to the social side of the equation - its encouragement of countless interactions and collaborations that create not just an impressive structure but a vibrant place.

The [restaurant, for example] became a radical, ongoing experiment in gourmet waste reduction. One day not long after the bistro opened, a Saskatchewan bison farmer finished his bison burger with a query for the kitchen: Why waste your money on a few patties or a rib eye or two when you can buy whole animals and save a bundle? The bistro soon became the farmer's biggest customer and now turns out bison onion soup, bison-tail stew and vacuum-packed bison jerky. The chef has also gone literally whole hog - ordering in entire pigs and curing his own prosciutto. What began as a somewhat aesthetic conceit ("Rocky Mountain comfort food") has become a model of efficient regional cuisine.

The rest of the Courtyard's tenants have engaged in similar experiments. The hair salon organizes monthly art shows. The video store donates its late fees to charity. And Wild Flour is not only the first real bakery that Banff has seen in more than a decade, but owner Jenna Dashney has also made it the first to dedicate itself to organic baking. [Tenants are rewarded for] such efforts with a \$2-per-square-foot rebate on rents."

FULL STORY: [Beyond buzzwords in Banff](#)

Saturday, October 20, 2007 in The Globe & Mail

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