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Treehugger: Bill McDonough's Bison Court in Banff

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The real deal in green design will not be found in single family houses in the country with acres of solar panels on the roof, but in the building of communities where people can live and work. The best examples might be projects like Bison Court in Banff, Alberta. It is built around an historic cabin by developer Peter Poole of Arctos & Bird , who hired the best- [William McDonough](#), with Zeidler and Partners' Calgary office as "architect of record". Landscape is by [Siteworks](#), with local colour by [Skatliff + Miller + Murray](#) .

Chris Turner of the Globe and Mail writes that it is "*an effort to bring truly sustainable development to a mountain town that had grown so rich on its natural beauty that it was on the verge of forgetting that a pretty view was not the same as a healthy ecosystem.*"

Turner continues:

"Sustainability is too often used as a buzzword, a bit of corporate-speak to describe the cosmetic tree-planting campaigns of relentless fossil-fuel burners. But Mr. Poole and his team embraced the deeper meaning of the word: Their redevelopment of the Crag Cabin property - which came to be known as Bison Courtyard - demonstrates the concept's full import as a baseline organizing principle.

They understand that sustainability is as vital as the clean air we breathe, and it has the power to be as disruptive to this century as democracy was to the one just past. When it is done right, sustainability lays the foundations for the institutions a healthy society needs and the way of life to which free people aspire."

The building has what Turner calls "*standard stuff in the green building game*"- green roofs, rainwater collection, waste diversion of building materials etc, but Turner gets the important part: "*What is truly remarkable about Bison Courtyard is its attention to the*

more and more people living over the stores, more you see in retail so that it is too small for the big chains and you go for mom and pop operations, (who get into the spirit of the place and apply cradle to cradle principles to the food that they cook and sell) and you get the kind of tenants who say *"I never leave the courtyard,"* says Ms. Dashney, who rents one of the 10 apartments built into the complex. *"If we had a wine shop here, we'd be perfect."*

Don't get me wrong; I love projects like the [Wired House by Living Homes](#). But they are not going to solve our problems or demonstrate how the vast majority of us are going to live. Nor is Bison Court, smack in the middle of one of Canada's biggest tourist attractions, Banff National Park. However if I had to pick a role model to emulate if we are going to learn to live sustainably, I know which I would choose. [Bison Court](#) via [Globe and Mail](#) behind a stupid fence.

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