

A New Landscape: Greening the City's Rooftops



Future Green Studio, a design-build firm in Brooklyn, specializes in creating new urban landscapes by creating green spaces on the blank canvases of the city's cement and tar roofs.

The urban rooftop environment has remained largely unchanged for the last 70 years, according to a recent report by Columbia University. The report noted that New York City has more than 30 square miles (more than 22 times the area of Central Park) of roof space that qualifies for the most part as "tar beaches."

David Seiter, the founder of Future Green Studio, a design-build firm in Brooklyn, which specializes in "landscape urbanism" and green roof design, wants to change all that. He looks at that empty canvas of cement and tar as an opportunity that is just waiting to be painted.

"Green roofs are both ancient and futuristic at the same time," he explains. "In a vertical city like New York, roofs really need to be utilized as public spaces. You can take the earth and lift it up on top of a building to create a new landscape."

Seiter credits his two years apprenticing with a garden designer in Kyoto, Japan, before acquiring his Masters in Landscape Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania, as a soul-chang-

ing endeavor. After graduating, he spent a few years working at a large firm developing plans for high profile projects including urban parks in India and Singapore. Designing while being stuck behind a computer just didn't do it for him — he wanted to use his experience for more hands on work.

In 2008, Seiter founded Future Green Studio, which has since grown to a team of 12 including designers, craftsmen and construction consultants.

The company's diverse portfolio ranges from green roofs and terraces to large commercial spaces, plus pro-bono consulting with urban farmers in Brooklyn.

"Our designs hope to reveal the site's sense of history, imagination, wonder and playfulness. Our intention is to scrape away, uncover and unearth the symbolic," says the landscape designer, who teaches "An Introduction to Green Roofs and Living Walls" at CUNY Citytech.

Current projects include the redesign of a park in Jersey City's Italian village. The site, once a refuge for young neighborhood families and old-timers play-

ing games of bocce and chess, had been locked up since the early 1980s.

"We are picking up on the history and sustainability of the site by repurposing the old and using new ecological measures," he says. For example, old brick from the pathways is being used to build new walls; rainwater collected from adjacent rooftops goes towards landscaping. The firm has also created a memory art wall that utilizes salvaged materials from the site.

Future Green Studio is currently installing a 3,500 square foot eco-green roof for an apartment building in Brooklyn as well as designing the MTA Plaza for the Carroll Street station.

"Our specialty is coming up with sustainable landscapes using local materials from within a 250-mile radius," explains Seiter. The group works with Bluestone, a slate that comes from a local quarry; drought-tolerant native plants; and regionally harvested woods. Seiter notes that ipe, a South American rain forest wood, is the usual "go-to" for exterior decking, railing and planters. He's look-

ing to change that approach by utilizing the more indigenous Eastern White Cedar and Black Locust.

Future Green Studio also keeps a 6,000 square foot lot, adjacent to their Brooklyn office and workshop, where they can test out a variety of green roof specific plants and store soils that aren't locally available. The lot also serves as a vegetable garden for the staff.

Landscape and gardens should be about wonder and exploration and fun and playfulness, says Seiter. "I think our spaces are respites from the city that offer calm and tranquility."

For information, call (718) 855-8995 or visit www.futuregreenstudio.com.

— Holly Reich

About

Big Town **Going Green**

Big Town Going Green is a series of articles showcasing local companies and initiatives that support the environment through innovative "green" programs or services.