

Land Matters

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Green roofs have come a long way from Tom Liptan's garage.

In 1998, when I first got interested in green roofs (also known as ecoroofs), I started doing research toward a ***Landscape Architecture*** article and put out feelers to my contacts around the United States and Canada, trying to find a built example of a lightweight green roof like those that had been implemented widely in Germany. I couldn't find a single one—except for a homemade version that Liptan, ASLA, rigged up on the roof of his residential garage in Portland, Oregon. A public-sector landscape architect interested in stormwater management, Liptan wanted to find out whether such a roof would soak up and retain significant rainfall. (It did and does.)

Things have changed significantly since then. From no green roofs in 1998, we are now up to more than 40 built or in design in Chicago alone, including one on the roof of City Hall. (Look for an article on it in ***LAM*** later this year.) Smart

developers in Portland have started to build green roofs, encouraged by the city, which wants to mitigate urban stormwater problems. And green roofs are appearing in other cities such as Toronto. On the supply side, a number of manufacturers have begun to provide the building blocks of green roofs: waterproofing liners, planting media, and complete, ready-to-install systems patterned on designs that have proven effective for decades in Germany.



I've just returned from the first-ever Green Roofs Conference in Chicago. The conference, an eye-opener in many ways, included a field trip to the prototype green roof being tested at the Center for Green Technology (CGT), shown above. (It looked a lot more lush on the day of my visit than in the photo.) As part of the conference, there was a juried competition for green roof designs, sponsored (like the conference) by the Toronto-based organization Green Roofs for Healthy Cities. The jury, of which I was a member, chose six projects in as many categories (see inset), and I'm pleased to announce that three of the six went to landscape architects.

These are all signs of progress, but I have to say that the "grass roofs movement" in North America is still in its infancy. The prototypes like the roofs on the CGT need to be monitored and tested to find out what works in North American cities with their hot, drought-stricken summers. Research undertaken on such prototypes needs to be widely shared so that practitioners are not continually reinventing the wheel.

Despite their strong showing in the awards, I wonder if landscape architects are moving into the green roof market with the same energy as architects and engineers, who show every sign of wanting to control the field. Landscape architects can still retain a foothold, but this is no time for tiptoeing into an opportunity that could help shape the future of this profession.

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