

"I saw the ocean, the sand, and the sky, and it just came to me."

Virtue in Vice

A New York nightclub owner and his architect celebrate the sexy side of sustainability.



You wouldn't call Jon Bakhshi, owner of the Chelsea megaclubs Home and Guest House, a tree hugger. The native New Yorker is all business, his rapid-fire patter more fluent in bottle service than in the ecological benefits of bamboo. But two and a half years ago, when Bakhshi was lying on the beach, mulling over new nightlife concepts, he hit upon an idea: build the world's first LEED-certified club. "I saw the ocean, the sand, and the sky, and it just came to me," he says of the inspiration. The result, Greenhouse, a 6,000-square-foot space that opened last November in Soho, teems with earth-friendly technologies and materials. But it also demonstrates how far green design has evolved, from fringe concern to mainstream marketing device.

True to its name, the club focuses on the sustainable and natural. Some 2,500 LEDs illuminate its two levels. Arranged on laser-cut plywood ribs, the **continued on page 32**

The color-changing LEDs that cover the ceiling of the club's first floor are an environmentally friendly way to refresh the decor without replacing any materials.



Some 5,000 crystals suspended from the ceiling help to create the feeling of a rolling landscape.

lights create an ever-changing tableau of colors while using one-thirtieth the energy of standard fluorescent bulbs. The club's floors and wall panels are bamboo, while the bars and banquettes (the latter upholstered in Maharam's 100 percent recyclable polyurethane Ledger fabric) are fashioned from FSC-certified wood. The bathrooms feature Kohler waterless urinals and low-flow toilets and sinks. And the temperature and ventilation are regulated by four high-efficiency HVAC systems—two on each floor—that use only outside air.

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Because the LEED for Commercial Interiors designation was integral to Greenhouse's business plan, Antonio Di Oronzo, the designer, collaborated with Daniel Hussler, president of the green-strategy firm Natural Progression, on the LEED documentation and certification processes and mechanical systems. Di Oronzo, an architect who has built all of Bakhshi's venues, says Greenhouse varied from those projects in four areas: cost, time, coordination, and construction methods. "The difference is, first of all, economical," he says, estimating that Greenhouse ran about \$250-\$300 per square foot, versus \$200 per square foot for a conventional club. As for design, it took the team "a lot longer to source certain materials, even though I have an ample library of eco-conscious suppliers." The construction required more advanced planning: "We could only use certain companies that were certified to take the debris to specific sites; if we were cutting wood in the space, we had to make sure nothing would be contaminated." And it meant that Di Oronzo had to rethink basic building materials, such as the adhesive used to secure wall studs.

Although Greenhouse is not the first nightclub to utilize eco-friendly technologies—Club WATT, in Rotterdam, expects to reduce its energy use by 50 percent, while Temple, in San Francisco, composts and boasts low-flow toilets—it is the first to commit to the time and expense of formal certification. Di Oronzo says it's no PR stunt. "When it comes to nightclubs, you need to make sure your credibility is irrefutable," he explains. "It's not an industry people respect. So this certification is the only thing that would legitimize the brand."

As for the lessons of taking on a green project, Bakhshi has this advice: "Make sure you have enough money." But despite the extra up-front costs, some of which should be recouped in energy savings, he plans to franchise Greenhouse, introducing branches in Miami, Atlanta, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. If going eco-friendly is such an expensive hassle, why bother? "It's like trial and learning," he says. "Now I think we have a pretty good handle on it. I made, I wouldn't call them mistakes, but now know what materials to use." He pauses. "It becomes very easy. I'd definitely like to stick with it." —Julie Taraska +
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