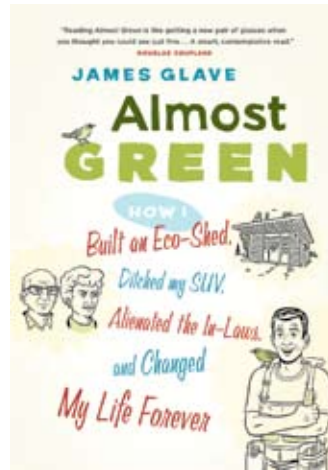


Book Views: On Plants and Animals and Building

Almost Green

By James Glave



Almost Green is funny, enjoyable to read and actually **hard to put down**. The style of writing is easy, conversational and engaging. The text on the cover, “How I Built an Eco-Shed, Ditched MY SUV, Alienated the In-Laws, and Changed My Life Forever,” gives away the plotline of the book, but it’s the way Glave writes about his adventure that is entertaining.

An Eco-Shed is a small writer’s studio that Glave hoped to build as a top-quality energy-efficient workspace in his yard. He **never expected that building “green” would be so complicated** or expensive. Selling the SUV was supposed to let him buy a “gas-sipper” of a car, but who knew that the market for used SUVs had soured?

As a house-husband and primary caregiver for two young children, Glave worked from home while his wife made arduous daily commutes. The challenges of placating tired children and a doubtful wife combine with the learning curve of hiring construction crews to add pressure to **a project that seemed simple at the start**.

Anyone who has built a house or garden shed or survived a renovation should have moments of **amused recognition** when reading this. Anyone intending to build “green” should study it closely.

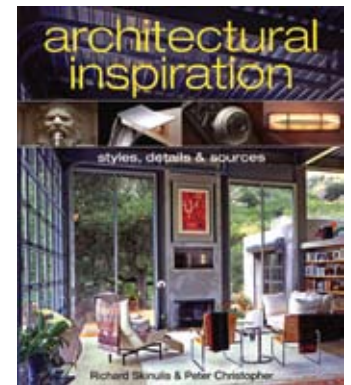
Greystone Books, 2008,
softcover, \$22.

Architectural Inspiration

By Richard Skinulis & Peter Christopher

This massive style guide is more than a dream-and-inspiration book. Chapters on product categories give close-up colour photographs of specific details and their sources, from exterior cladding to cabinet hardware, making it easier to buy what you like. Yet for viewers who enjoy looking at other people’s houses and interiors, this is **a treasure trove of large, beautiful photographs**.

You either love the look of a style or wince at it. Some must enjoy the boxy, minimalist lines of modern de-



sign, while others love formal classicism and still others are drawn to rustic, salvage-filled rooms. If you’re not sure what your personal design style is, this book can help you identify it.

There are also **wildly creative expressions** from artists who built kitchen tables out of blackboards and a chandelier out of tree roots, to a designer who opened up the ceiling to a second-floor bedroom in order to create a two-storey library.

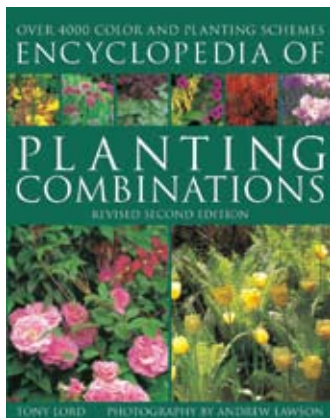
Usually, browsing a decorating book doesn’t lead to practical ideas you can actually implement. A curved wall to display sculpture requires significant renovation in most homes. Yet if **a book like this inspires you** to de-clutter and clean up a room, it’s a positive influence.

The Boston Mills Press, 2007,
hardcover, \$79.95.

By Gloria Hildebrandt

Encyclopedia of Plant Combinations

By Tony Lord



Gardening close to the Niagara Escarpment can have you dreaming the impossible dream. Clay soil, rocks, bugs, prolific weeds and did I mention *rocks*, make it a challenge. I am happy when anything is in bloom. I try not to buy yellow flowers because I'm convinced that **yellow is the default colour** that all plants revert to over time.

If you have more control over your garden than I do, this is a book for you, a heavy reference suggesting more than 4,000 colour and planting schemes. Definitely a dream book, its stunning photographs from gardens in the U.K. and Europe are **intended to inspire**.

Case studies of great planting designers explain the convictions of Beth Chatto, Rosemary Verey, Penelope Hobhouse, Canadians Nori and Sandra Pope and others. Yet most of the book concentrates on the plant categories shrubs and small tree, climbers, roses, perennials, bulbs and annuals, describing individuals' characteristics and **suggesting good planting partners**. If you're an advanced gardener or don't mind looking at photos of gardens you will never be able to create, you'll enjoy this reference.

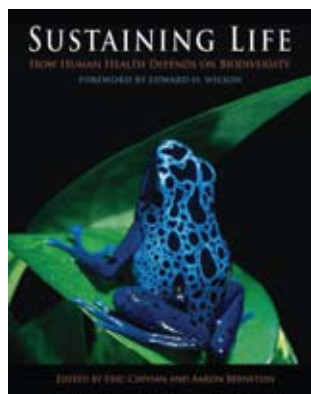
Firefly Books, 2008,
hardcover, \$59.95.

Sustaining Life: How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity

Edited by Eric Chivian and
Aaron Bernstein

The title of this impressive collection of papers is to be read literally and from the perspective of human survival. This work demonstrates that **biodiversity is crucial** to the life and health of humans.

"Biodiversity" is short for biological diversity and the authors warn of the dangers to ourselves of the substantial and irreversible loss in the diversity of life on earth that humans have caused and continue to cause.



This collection regards all plant and animal life as having the potential to be **of service to humans**. It calls for the protection of ecosystems and life forms because they are a vast, untapped resource for humans. Gro Harlem Brundtland is credited with the statement "The library of life is burning and we do not know the titles of the book."

Comprehensive chapters detail the many ways we are threatening biodiversity, then present the medicines, medical research, infectious diseases, and food production techniques that are offered or endangered by our actions.

The authors see the vast, sometimes unknown range of plants and animals as **a resource for humans** to harvest or exploit, although sustainably, **for the improvement and preservation of our own species**.

Oxford University Press, 2008,
hardcover, \$30.95