

William McDonough: Re-Designing the World

"As our transportation systems become pollution-free, all of a sudden the highways could be in tunnels," wrote William McDonough in *Resurgence Magazine*.

"They can be buried, just like when New York City switched over to electric locomotives -- they put the trains underground and they got Park Avenue, some of the most valuable real estate in the world."

McDonough, who was a recipient of the first and only Presidential Award for Sustainable Development and who Time magazine called "a hero of the planet," designed a factory for Ford with a living roof resembling a meadow that provides habitat for songbirds, insects and small mammals. It is made of drought resistant perennials that produce red, white, yellow and purple flowers.

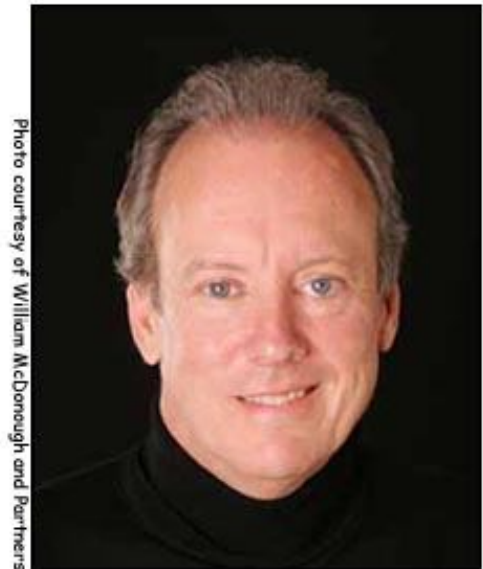


Photo courtesy of William McDonough and Partners

William McDonough

The roof keeps the building cool in the summer, warm in the winter and stores rain so that in a storm, water trickles down slowly rather than rushing into the Rough River along with pollutants from the parking lot and soil.

He designed a factory for the Herman Miller Company that has a tree-lined day-lit street that runs the entire length of the building.

When McDonough was former dean of architecture at the University of Virginia, he promoted zero pollution and total recycling.

The Chinese government has hired McDonough to develop entire cities that will use no fossil fuel, and have no sprawl, pollution, congestion or waste.

The Chinese government also published a book McDonough wrote with German environmental chemist Michael Braungart as official government policy. The book, Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things is printed on paper made of plastic resins and inorganic fillers instead of tree pulp or cotton. It looks the same as traditional paper, but is waterproof, durable and infinitely recyclable since the inks separate from the polymer.

"Trees are too valuable to use as paper," wrote McDonough and Braungart.

Braungart, one of the founders of the German Green Party, and McDonough formed a product design company called McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry (MBDC) that works by nature's rules. Instead of designing products that go from

cradle to the grave - ending up in a landfill, where valuable resources get buried, products go from cradle to cradle. The materials the products are made from are either returned to industry as raw materials for new products or are safely decomposed to make rich black humus.

McDonough has a sign in his office that says "eliminate the concept of waste."

McDonough and Braungart designed a fabric that is so nontoxic it can be "mulch for the local garden club" when it is no longer useful.

Regulators of the factory that makes the fabric thought their instruments were broken when they tested the building's effluent and found that the water going out was as clean as the water going in. Before, the effluent was laced with mutagens, carcinogens, endocrine disrupters, persistent toxins and bioaccumulative substances.

Braungart and McDonough designed a soap while asking, "What kind of soap does the river want?"