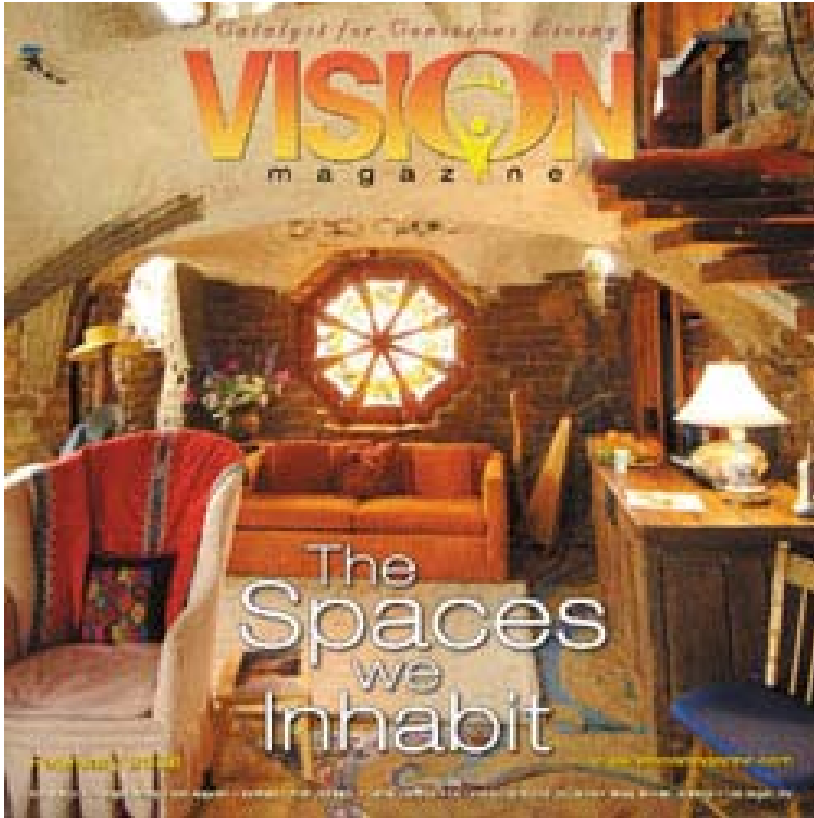


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The Space We Choose to Inhabit

a conversation with Drew Hubbell

by Sydney L. Murray

Rainbow Hill Bed and Breakfast, www.rainbowhill.com

When I first heard James Hubbell speak years ago at a place called Colonia Esperanza my mind was opened to what our spaces can do for our souls. I had always loved the outdoors and the amazing cathedrals of nature and had lived in some beautiful places, but until that moment I had not understood the importance of the walls that surround us. Hubbell spoke eloquently at this building site of an orphanage in Tijuana and said, "We are here to create a home for these children and we could build them out of the concrete blocks that surround us in so many structures. But what would that say to the children? Or we could build a place of beauty, a place of wonderment, a place that delights them and what would that say to the children?" I have never forgotten those words because at that moment I became aware of the great difference in creating a space where lyricism and art are as important as the engineering of the structure. Recently I had the great pleasure of speaking with Drew Hubbell, who is an architect and the son of the artist James Hubbell. I knew after we spoke the great gift that Drew Hubbell was offering our community and world.

VM: Your website details a mission which pivots around a fusion of passionate artistry, respect for nature and practicality. Tell me about the mission of Hubbell and Hubbell and your role in this vision.

Drew Hubbell: The mission of Hubbell and Hubbell is to integrate art into spaces, but also to look at the bigger picture of the world and how much building affects our environment and the world that we're in, such as the cost of materials on the world, and taking concrete out of the world and cutting down trees. Considering all of these factors, we try to balance the beauty of these spaces through the integration of art and natural materials.

VM: I know that you were one of the first to integrate straw bale in your designs. What other materials do you use which are environmentally friendly?

DH: Well, my parents started by using adobe blocks, which were made in Escondido, which they used to mill there. They also used native stone from the land, and they used cedar. There used to be a cedar mill up in the Julian area. And so now, in the rebuilding of their home, (which was burned in the fires of 2003) they're using trees that were burned in the Pine Fire that they are milling as a waste product, and they're getting those beautiful cedar logs out of that. Some of our other homes or projects are using aerated concrete blocks, which is a material that uses concrete as its base but then injects aluminum. This creates air pockets in the concrete so it uses less cement and creates an insulated block, as opposed to an all-cement block.

VM: Is it just as stable as concrete?

DH: Yes, it's a stable module block system, versus the traditional CMU (concrete masonry units) block.

VM: And do you use that here in Southern California because it is a more hospitable



VM: How can people change the space they are living or working in?

DH: By trying to connect to nature. You can do a lot of things with plants and with water, such as Japanese homes and shoji doors, sliding wood doors with the

environment or are these used everywhere?

DH: Yes, we're using it in a house up in Oregon. There's also some recycled foam block systems that we're using on a couple of different homes, and a foam panel that you spray concrete over the top.

VM: You speak of art influencing your design, and your father James Hubbell is an amazing artist. How do you feel that his art influences your architectural design?

DH: Well, art is really in the eye of the beholder; it can be anything from a tastefully placed window that takes advantage of the view, or the sunlight, or the breezes. And then some of our clients re-design everything down to the doorknob. It can be a beautiful stained glass window that transforms a space. We remodeled a small house with my brother in North Park, and my dad had an extra stained glass window, so we fit it into a bathroom and it changed the bathroom into a cathedral, emphasizing that the play of color and texture can make a big difference.

VM: So what propelled you into the world of architecture?

DH: I think growing up and helping to build my parent's homes, the buildings that are on their property, was always an integral part of my growing up. I grew up mixing cement and laying blocks and doing mosaic tile, as well as just being around my father's studio. Building was really a part of my blood, it was something I always knew that I had a big interest in and in college it solidified and I decided that was the avenue I wanted to go.

VM: I know that you are involved in some of the policy-making of making straw bale structures. How has that unfolded and what has been your experience in this policy-making aspect?

DH: It was about educating those making the policy and what we did was put together an educational package for them. So, we did a lot of homework and provided paperwork upfront. It boils down to educating them to make them feel comfortable with a new product. This is the same for any of the products that we use, and straw bale is a good example, but you have to make them (policy-makers) comfortable that it meets all their codes and is safe. And then they're willing, in most cases, to try it. It was a little more difficult to obtain permits for The Friends Center, which is a church, and that's through the city of San Diego, and they weren't as open to it, but then they finally did allow the permit for that structure. The Friends Center is right off the 94 and Home Avenue, right near downtown.

VM: What do you consider to be new architecture?

DH: What do you mean by new?

VM: The way that people are utilizing space, rather than the typically large American homes.

DH: The trends in architecture are definitely being pushed more toward modernism, which is becoming popular again. I think some of that comes from the cost of materials and building. The row homes that you see down in Little Italy and downtown have become popular because they're very efficient with space, very modular, very easy to build. We also see an emphasis on a lot of interesting green buildings. That's definitely a focus of a number of people, wanting to use materials that are friendlier to the earth and also healthier to our bodies, that don't give off gas or have any toxins in them.

opaque panels in between them that open up. In our climate it's great to have outdoor rooms. You're making the small room feel very large by moving the barriers between the space inside to outside. If you can open up in San Diego, especially to the outdoors, take advantage of this. Building smaller homes is the trend that's coming back, small homes that use the outdoors as part of their living space.

VM: What is your advice to homeowners that would like to begin to create a more green living space?

DH: What I would say to homeowners is to trust your instincts and really plan out spaces, and some people are creative and they can work and design their own spaces, and sometimes you'll need a designer or an architect to work with you. And don't be afraid to consult a professional, because we have a range of expertise in training, so we might be able to see something that someone who's just doing it on a weekend or once in a lifetime might not see, a simple solution. For example, opening up a south-facing window so you get a little more pass of solar and natural light, bringing in light and ventilation.

VM: I think it's amazing that the California Solar Initiative bill just passed, with the 3 billion dollars allocated towards solar. Do you do a lot of solar in your designs?

DH: We have, in almost all of our newer homes, integrated either passive solar water heating, or an integration of energy producing [solar]. Many people haven't been able to afford the actual panels because they're still fairly expensive, but they're wired for them, knowing that an energy crisis is coming up and hopefully it will be more affordable.

VM: Do you think that's part of the problem, that people think bringing in an architect to help them evaluate their house is only for the wealthy?

DH: I think that's an issue. I just met with clients in Mission Hills and they don't have a large budget and they don't want someone to tell them they need to add 2,000 square feet to their house to make it marketable, they just wanted input. I think architects are happy to do that. It's nice to design a new home, but a lot of the work right now is with remodeling and making the

existing space more comfortable for the people that live in them.

VM: So what do you see changing in our world in the next decade?

DH: The big picture, I think, is that people need to get away from the concept that everybody needs to have their single plot of land with a green lawn in front of it. People have to adjust to the mixed living life—we're starting to see more of a downtown [kind of space] in urban situations, with a little more density, which then allows for more open spaces. People just aren't building track homes over the hillside, where you preserve some of that. We need to create pockets where transportation can come together. So my vision is to help with that vision. We do a lot of homes out in the country, but there's also a great need for beautiful architecture for higher-density space. A good example is a granny flat, which a lot of the older homes have. [This is] a second dwelling on the property where an elderly person or parents can live, or you can just obtain rent from that space. It adds to the density but it's still very comfortable for people.

VM: Tell me about the dreams that you hold for your work.

DH: One of my dreams is to be able to get my father's work in to a larger public eye, such as the Cathedral that [Antoni] Gaudi designed in Barcelona. Something where my father can really exhibit his sculptural and artistic sense in a large scale for people. And we've done that already, there's a new gazebo in Shelter Island across from Humphrey's on Shelter Island Drive.

For more information on Drew and James Hubbell's works, please visit www.hubbellandhubbell.com or call 619/231-0446.

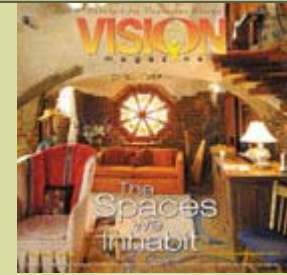
Artist of the Month



RJ Pennell

Growing up in Ocean Beach, RJ Pennell has been a photographer since 1974. Starting out in photojournalism after attending San Diego State and UCSD, he found his way to fine art in the mid 80s with a project called San Diego Urban Nude. RJ is presently working with the element of size and time in land and seascapes. In addition, he is also interested in exploring the subtleties and sensuality of flowers. Through his work RJ seeks to link abstract expressionism and photography. RJ has also taught photography at Southwestern College and is currently pursuing both commercial and artistic endeavors. His work also includes architecture, yachts, model portfolios, large format printing and graphic design. RJ has recently focused exclusively in capturing his images digitally and only uses film on special projects. His recent exhibits include the San Diego Art Institute and Studio 407. To contact RJ, call 619/246-3436 or email photoimagist@cox.net.

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