

Five hundred years ago, long before home design journals encouraged Hudson Valley residents to build homes that were visually harmonious with nature, the original New Yorkers—the Iroquois—were living in homes that were not only aesthetically appealing but also healthy to live in. Their homes were resource independent and ecologically sound, the perfect example of a > good home. The Iroquois Longhouse looked like a nest turned on its head, an elegant and organic home built from a network of interconnected wood struts anchored into the ground and thickly covered with leather and straw. Yet at the southern end it was wide open to harness the power of the sun—solar power. The sun's winter angle is low to the ground and comes entirely from the south, thus allowing the maximum amount of sun light and "solar" heat to penetrate the home. A long, open floor plan provided for living, dining and sleeping all under one wide, arched structure; the high ceiling and strategically located vent holes allowed for easy air-flow while the solidity of the sidewalls kept the family safe and warm. An ideal farm homestead, these compact longhouses were built in clusters allowing for a minimal footprint so the Iroquois people could maximize all available land for life-sustaining hedgerows and farm fields.

From that point on, ecologically speaking, things only went downhill. By the mid-1800's, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing and the Hudson River Valley had reached a crisis: Its river was polluted from industrial waste; its forests were being over-logged; its mountains, cliffs and hillsides were scarred from mining; and its farmland was being depleted by urban sprawl. Thankfully, it did not go unnoticed. Led by a grassroots movement of artists and artisans, today's conservation movement was born. Each in their respective field had a prescription for promoting and tapping into the benefits of nature while at the same time sustaining it.

IN ARCHITECTURE, IT WAS ANDREW JACKSON DOWNING WHO FIXED HIS ATTENTION ON ENCOURAGING SMARTER, HEALTHIER AND GREENER HOMES, WHAT I WOULD CALL "THE GOOD HOME" 150 YEARS LATER.

The green movement of today owes everything to visionaries like Downing—a gardener and architect, who created America's first home design books. What he wrote then is just as relevant today: "Beauty grows out of the enrichment of some useful or elegant features of the house as the windows and verandas" which create "a harmonious union between the architecture and the landscape". The picturesque architect firmly believes that the beauty of the rural landscape can be preserved in large part by encouraging an appreciation of the environment, agriculture and wildlife and fostering the construction of rurally-sensitive places to live.

Fast forward to twenty-first century architecture where futuristic designs are now being explored using these very same nature-inspired techniques to create affordable, prefabricated green structures that require little-to-no energy to keep them heated or cooled. Thanks to A.J. Downing, the Hudson Valley homes of tomorrow will be able to accomplish all he had aspired to and more. The homes of tomorrow will not only be able to power themselves from the sun, wind and ground like the Iroquois, they will have the ability to produce more energy than the household can consume and, in turn, this homemade, clean energy can power nearby farms, schools, and industries.

Waste-not, want-not is the principle behind the picturesque homes of tomorrow and it can be accomplished without compromise and with the unique aesthetic that best reflects the heritage and heart of those that live within. By investing today in developing these > good homes of tomorrow, the future is very bright indeed for the Hudson Valley and all rural landscapes of America.



A BRIEF HISTORY of Architectural Harmony IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

17th CENTURY NATIVE AMERICAN LONG HOUSE

The original New Yorkers, the Iroquois, were living in homes that were not only aesthetically appealing but also healthy to live in.



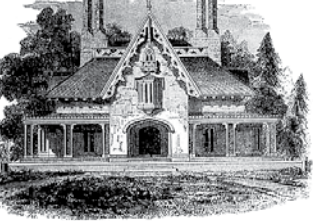
18th CENTURY BOW HOUSE

Named because the roof is shaped to match the inverted bow of a ship, many believe that the bow rafters of the early homes were salvaged from the bow of the ships that were wrecked on Cape Cod.



19th CENTURY A. J. DOWNING

A house by Downing, a gardener, and later an architect, who found himself creating America's first home design books.



20th CENTURY PHILIP JOHNSON ONETA HOUSE

Johnson built homes that used uninterrupted spans of windows to blur the separation between the indoors and the outdoors.



21st CENTURY THE HUDSON PASSIVE PROJECT

Futuristic designs are being explored using these very same nature-inspired techniques to create affordable, green structures.



Source: *Cottage Residences, A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Country Villas*; 1873; published by John Wiley and Sons. AJ Downing was the author.