Open For Business

New Conservation Center to Open at Sam's Point Preserve

The Nature Conservancy and the Open Space Institute, Inc. have scheduled the opening of the ***Sam's Point Conservation Center*** at *Sam's Point Preserve* in Cragsmoor for May 22nd. The 3,000 square-foot building *(cover, and photo, right)* is a model of "green" building practices, and was designed by nationally-recognized architect Matthew Bialecki, AIA, to complement and reflect the dramatic setting at **Sam's Point**.

The Center, a project of The Nature Conservancy, will serve as a base for scientific research, land stewardship and education, and houses exhibits focusing on the unique geological, ecological, and cultural features of the *Preserve*.

"It tries to emulate the character of Sam's Point," says local architect Matthew Bialecki, who kept the preserve's geology, ecology, and botany in mind when designing the building. "It's a landscape with a roof on it," he adds. The center's design, which meets the standards of the National Green Building Council, was constructed using local, sustainable wood and has a passive solar design (meaning it regulates its own temperature with only a minimal amount of extra heat needed). The wallboard is made from recyclable materials and the insulation consists of cotton scraps from blue jeans.

Constructed of "Gunk-crete" – a locally-manufactured cement product that is a specially-formulated concrete and quartzite aggregate similar to the local Shawangunk conglomerate, evoking the bedrock of the **Shawangunks** – and sustainably-harvested hemlock timbers *(photo, right)*, the building is sheltered by a recycled steel roof, a unique "Umbrella Roof," named for its inherent shading qualities and designed to dissipate summer heat through a layered system of high-performance insulation with a radiant barrier under recycled metal roof panels. In combination, the special features of the building result in a 50% increase in energy-efficiency.

The Center demonstrates practical applications of energy-efficient, state-of-the-art sustainable building practices and passive solar design that will provide maximum comfort to *Preserve* visitors. The earth-bermed building was designed as an extension of the landscape; flooring, timbers, structural framing and lighting pass seamlessly from interior to exterior, dissolving the normal boundaries between the site and the structure.

For the outer walls, Bialecki tried to recreate the coarse white stones from the **Ridge** located above the center. Thus, the "Gunk-crete" that closely resembles the

Shawangunk conglomerate. A glass wall, outlined by long wooden beams, frames the towering ridge and leads visitors outside to the preserve's trails. "The overall intention of the center is to provide not only support for the land conservancy commission, but to also be an educational facility – an interpretive facility," explains Bialecki. *(photo of model of site, next page, top left)*

The landscaping, designed by Stefan Yarabek, ASLA, includes restoration of damaged areas, improved parking and signage, and features native plants collected at the *Preserve* by interns and volunteers.

A forty-foot mural on the back wall by noted artist Linda Thomas depicts the distinctive habitats of the *Preserve*, featuring the globally-rare ridgetop dwarf pine barrens and ice caves environs located at the *Preserve*. Visitors of all ages will delight in finding more than 90 species of plants, birds, mammals, and insects native to the *Preserve* within the expanse of the mural. A computer will make the mural interactive, helping visitors discover what may not be visible during a daylong visit. Displays featuring photos, stories, and activities that explain the geology and history of the area will also be on view.

According to Cara Lee, Director of the Conservancy's *Shawangunk Ridge Program*, "The new ***Conservation Center*** is designed to inspire and inform visitors about the extraordinary beauty and special ecology of **Sam's Point**." She added "***The Center*** will welcome school groups, volunteers, hikers, and others who come to the *Preserve*, providing a place of discovery for all who visit." Further, "the building is in keeping with the historical and artistic element" of the area, which was an early art colony. The new ***Center*** replaces the old visitors' center *(photo, left)* which has been razed.

Lee explains that, although recycled materials often cost more than their counterparts, their benefits increase over time: "We feel like [the extra costs] are worth it in terms of what they're doing to educate the public, and in terms of how they're contributing to the environment."

The Open Space Conservancy, the land acquisition affiliate of the Open Space Institute (OSI), acquired the