

LANDSCAPE OF THE MIND

THE IMAGINARIUM OF REVOLUTIONARY ARCHITECT, ARTIST AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVIST FRITZ HAEG

BY **STEPHEN KRCDMAR** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **LESLIE FURLONG** AND **MEGHAN QUINN**



Fritz Haeg at home in the dome with his dog, Oli; Photo by Meghan Quinn

Fritz Haeg is in upstate New York when he picks up the phone and says he needs to find a quiet place to chat. This is no surprise: for most of the past decade, catching him in a quiet space was unlikely because his home, a geodesic dome in Los Angeles, doubled as a meeting place similar to a French salon where artists, poets and thinkers came together to discuss ideas and act on them.

But now, on the phone, he's running through what he's up to these days: working on his third book, *Animal Estates*, in the midst of a four-month project at X Initiative in Manhattan (July thru October 17), where he's turned 8,000 square feet of space into a temporary community, caring for an edible plant garden five blocks away from the gallery that features plants native to the island of Manhattan, and also preparing to head off to London to present his new book,

The Sundown Salon Unfolding Archive, which documents six years of special events at his home.

That's not all. He pauses, takes a breath as if he's deciding to search his mind for more or just exhale, "Sometimes, I have to go to my own Web site to know what I'm doing."

Defining Haeg isn't easy. He's an accomplished architect who no longer makes buildings. He's a college professor who no longer carries a course load. And he's an artist who has shown at The Whitney, Tate Modern and The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. But he doesn't make art a person can buy.

Most simply, he's a visionary and maybe even a revolutionary who believes pulling the trigger on significant change is best done with a green thumb. The opposite of NIMBY, he believes important

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change is as close as your backyard or at least your front lawn. The proof? His book *Edible Estates: Attack On The Front Lawn* documents his quest to encourage Americans replace their lawns with food producing gardens like the one he curated in the Salinas, Kansas (the geographic center of the United States) and other areas across the U.S. before spreading across the country and even across the pond to the Tate Modern in London.

Released in the spring, 2008, the book currently sold-out and a new edition is slated for the spring. Although he’s passionate about this project, he doesn’t believe that the answers to society’s woes end with each American picking up a hoe.

“The interesting thing about the moment we’re in and the work that I’m interested in is there’s no single solution. It’s not that simple,” he explains. “We’re not waiting for a silver bullet to our current social and environmental problems. [A solution] requires everyone approaching [these problems] in a local and personal way.”

Haeg embodies this by addressing more than one problem. Another one of his projects, Animal Estates, creates homes for animals displaced by humans.

The fact that Haeg creates homes is, in a way, a return, well, home for him. The architect was focused on the conventional aspects of his craft for almost 20 years before moving to LA and turning his attention to teaching, gardening and holding events. But his professional training informs everything he does, “I’m taking all the skills that an architect has but applying them to things other than buildings,” he says.

The fact that Haeg is utilizing the precise skills of an architect and applying them to the chaos of gardening and community initially surprised book designer Stacy Wakefield, a friend and collaborator. She describes the non-pretentious and friendly Haeg as “not someone who’s trying to get famous or trying to make a lot of money. He just loves ideas and collaborating on projects: he’s a true intellectual.”

But he is incredibly driven. After moving to LA, he made a conscious break from what he describes as the common goal of most architects: to make progressively bigger and more expensive buildings, with bigger and bigger staffs, until eventually reaching a pinnacle of success of making one-of-a-kind buildings around the world.

If this is the architect’s dream, he’s become the anti-architect who uses their tools for his own means.

“I’ve become really interested in creating things that are so

impossibly modest and simple and cheap that anyone can do them. And removing myself as the brilliant, genius type person who’s uniquely capable of doing them,” says Haeg. “If everyone can do them then the real power comes from the capacity for the project spread. And once they’re meaningful enough and they do spread, they have much great impact and influence and much more meaning, I think, than these one-off monuments that only one person can do.”

www.fritzhaeg.com



Before and after: Edible Estates regional prototype garden #6: Baltimore, Maryland; Photos by Leslie Furlong

