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NOVEMBER 2009

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The Food Issue

"We have come to realize that the sensations that have been sold to us as **PLEASURE** are hollow, unattainable aspirations that are filling us with anxiety, destroying our quality of life, and a root cause for our gradual destruction of our natural environment. The faster car, wider TV, shinier hair, bigger house, sexier underwear and smaller phone are not enough, we demand real pleasure: **DANCE** in our homes, **GARDENS** on our streets and **WILDLIFE** in our cities!"

– Fritz Haeg (p. 56)



PHOTO BY FRITZ HAEG OF THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK

LANDSCAPE OF THE MIND

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

BY **STEPHEN KRCMAR** 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.

But that's not all. He pauses and 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," he says.

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 a person’s backyard or 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 Salina, 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 spring 2008, the book is currently sold-out and a new edition is slated for spring 2010. Although Haeg is 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.

Haeg also utilizes the precise skills of an architect and applies them to the chaos of gardening and community, which 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 his 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 [in] 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 greater impact and influence and much more meaning, I think, than these one-off monuments that only one person can do.”

www.fritzaeg.com

