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Lawn Ranger

An artist attempts to convert the American front yard into a garden of eating.

by Tina Barseghian | Photo Ramona Rosales

Los Angeles has long been stereotyped as a vast and vapid desert where glaring sidewalks stretch for miles devoid of trees, and silicone-injected starlets barricade themselves in gas-guzzling Humvees.

But from his domed perch in the hilly neighborhood of Mount Washington, Fritz Haeg enjoys a completely different vantage point. The landscape designer, architect, industrial designer, educator, photographer, and artist-at-large views the city as an inspirational landscape for both his professional and personal projects. "Moving to L.A. [from New York City] has been a huge catalyst for my work," he says.

Haeg is perhaps best known for his Edible Estates project, an attempt to eradicate one of environmentalists' most vexing scourges: the American front lawn. To counter the practice of planting high-maintenance grass that doesn't offer anything in return, Haeg is installing edible gardens around the United States. The premiere site was in Salina, Kansas, the geographic center of the country. Even there, where agriculture remains a thriving industry, gardens of eggplant, watermelon, squash, and corn stand out. In L.A.—where the project is in its second incarnation—grassy lawns

are often equal in size to parks, and fruits and vegetables are doubly conspicuous.

But that was the whole point: "The project only makes sense as a stark contrast between it and everything around it," Haeg says. "It has to be very obvious that something happened there—an environment where the lawn has done serious damage to the social fabric of community."

No doubt the edible roof garden he's working on now in L.A. will be noticed too. In the meantime, Haeg is interviewing homeowners in suburban New York as potential candidates for the next Edible Estates project.

In addition to his mission of eliminating the lawn, Haeg also helms the Sundown Schoolhouse, which he describes as a "home-based educational environment with an activist mission." Students gather in his geodesic home for weekly 12-hour seminars in which they learn about a variety of artistic disciplines, including dance, visual arts, performance, and literature.

"The house begs for people to spend time there," he says. "There are no closets or doors or bedrooms, no living room." And—it should be said—no lawn.



Triangle of Repose: Fritz Haeg, right, in his geodesic studio. Above, the Kansas edible garden site, before and after.



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AUGUST 27

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