

ABOUT OMEGA INSTITUTE FOR HOLISTIC STUDIES

Founded in 1977, Omega Institute for Holistic Studies is the nation's most trusted source for wellness and personal growth. As a nonprofit organization, Omega offers diverse and innovative educational experiences that inspire an integrated approach to personal and social change. Located on more than 250 acres in the beautiful Hudson Valley, Omega welcomes more than 23,000 people to its workshops, conferences, and retreats in Rhinebeck, New York and at exceptional locations around the world, and reaches approximately 2 million people online at eOmega.org.

OMEGA'S SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

As an environmental steward, Omega is dedicated to mitigating its environmental impact, and to teaching others how to adopt sustainable living practices. For nearly four decades, Omega has hosted dozens of programs focused on environmental sustainability, with leaders like Al Gore, Jane Goodall, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Vandana Shiva, Jeremy Rifkin, and many more.

Omega's commitment to sustainability includes recycling, composting, and conservation, powering 100% of campus electricity through the purchase of wind and solar power, supporting sustainable agriculture and local business, and reducing greenhouse gases through shuttle services, ride sharing, and LiveNeutral™ (a program to offset carbon emissions).

We are currently reviewing and reducing our total carbon footprint, including every purchase we make and every vendor we do business with, and have made substantial progress on how we manage our daily campus operations.

WHAT IS THE OCSL?

The Omega Center for Sustainable Living (OCSL) demonstrates and teaches what is possible through regenerative design. A state-of-the-art water reclamation facility and environmental education center, the award-winning OCSL is the first building in America to have achieved both LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™ certification – the highest environmental performance standards available.

More than just a building, the OCSL provides educational opportunities for students, teachers, architects, environmental activists, policymakers, and visitors to Omega's campus and online. In addition to annual environmental conferences and workshops, the OCSL offers an innovative 4-week residential permaculture certificate program, with an option for college credit, called the Ecological Literacy Immersion Program (ELIP).

The OCSL building brings together wastewater recycling, clean energy, regenerative design, and other sustainability elements that can be replicated locally and globally. It also demonstrates the critical intersection of environmental sustainability, renewable energy, and the new green economy.

The OCSL building was designed by Kansas City-based BNIM Architects, renowned for sustainable design. The OCSL supplies all of its own energy needs and its operation is carbon neutral. The self-sustaining building is heated and cooled using geothermal systems, and utilizes photovoltaic power. The building, which is open to the public year-round for tours, includes a greenhouse, an Eco-Machine™, constructed wetland, and a classroom.

The core of the center is a 4,500-square-foot greenhouse containing a water filtration system called the Eco-Machine™. This living system uses plants, bacteria, algae, snails, and fungi to recycle Omega's wastewater (approximately 5 million gallons per year) into clean water that is used to restore the aquifer. The system is chemical free, uses zero net energy, and creates a closed loop hydrological cycle. John Todd Ecological Design is the architecture firm that created the Eco Machine™.

WHY DID OMEGA BUILD AN ECO MACHINE™ AND THE OCSL?

The Eco Machine™ was designed to serve a very practical purpose, as it replaced Omega's aging septic system and now supports the physical operations of Omega's campus in a way that is in alignment with our core value, sustainability. By using our own purchasing power, educational capacity and commitment to sustainability, Omega is demonstrating creative ways to meet the environmental challenges we face today. Additionally, the OCSL gives visitors an educational experience that helps bring new understanding of the interdependence of all things. Through its very design, the center teaches people to imagine a new paradigm for sustainable living.

WHAT IS THE LIVING BUILDING CHALLENGE™?

The OCSL was a pioneering project in the Living Building Challenge™, a program of the International Living Future Institute. The Living Building Challenge™ was launched by the Cascadia Green Building Council (a chapter of both the U.S. Green Building Council and Canada Green Building Council).

The Living Building Challenge™ is a building certification program, advocacy tool and philosophy that defines the most advanced measure of sustainability in the built environment possible today and acts to rapidly diminish the gap between current limits and the end-game positive solutions we seek.

The Living Building Challenge™ asks us to imagine a building that is informed by its eco-region's characteristics; generates all of its own energy with renewable resources; captures and treats all of its water; and operates efficiently, and for maximum beauty.

The OCSL received Living Building Challenge™ certification in October 2010.

WHAT IS LEED® PLATINUM STATUS?

The OCSL was constructed to meet the highest green building standards of the trade: LEED® Platinum status. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ is a third-party certification program and the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high-performance buildings. LEED® provides building owners and operators with the tools they need to have an immediate and measurable impact on their building's performance. It encourages and accelerates global adoption of sustainable green building and development practices through the creation and implementation of universally understood and accepted tools and performance criteria. By meeting certain criteria, a project accumulates credits. The total number of credits a project finishes with determines its LEED® status, Certified, Silver, Gold, or Platinum.

The OCSL received LEED® Platinum status in October 2010.