

ABOUT OMEGA INSTITUTE (Home of the OCSL)

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 people to its workshops, conferences, and retreats in Rhinebeck, New York and online at eOmega.org.

WHAT ARE 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 more than four decades, Omega has hosted scores of environmental conferences, and workshops focused on regenerative principles that restore and benefit the environment. Past faculty have included Jane Goodall, John Todd, Vandana Shiva, Jeremy Rifkin, and Winona LaDuke, among others.

Omega's commitment to reducing the carbon footprint of campus operations includes powering 100% of campus electricity through solar and wind sources. It engages in rigorous conservation, recycling, and composting programs. All takeout containers at Omega's Café are compostable. The dining service largely sources from regional growers as part of an ongoing review of all carbon-conscious purchases, and of Omega's efforts to support sustainable agriculture and local business. By using its own purchasing power, educational capacity, and commitment to sustainability, Omega is demonstrating creative ways to meet environmental challenges.

The celebrated Omega Center for Sustainable Living (OCSL) is the most dynamic example of Omega's environmental leadership.

WHAT IS THE OCSL?

The OCSL is an environmental education center that demonstrates and teaches what is possible through regenerative thinking and design. Operating since 2009, the OCSL integrates the campus's state-of-the-art Eco Machine™ (natural water reclamation facility) with a robust environmental education program, focused on a whole systems, place-based approach to problem solving that considers the connections between society, nature, and individuals.

OCSL BUILDING

The award-winning OCSL building was the first in the U.S. to achieve both LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™ certification—the highest environmental performance standards available. It brings together wastewater recycling, renewable energy, and other sustainability elements that can be replicated.

Designed by the renowned firm BNIM Architects, the OCSL also demonstrates environmental leadership through its carbon neutral operations and by supplying all of its energy needs. It is heated and cooled using geothermal systems, as well as by drawing photovoltaic power from its solar array.

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The core of the facility is a 4,500-square-foot greenhouse containing a water filtration system called the Eco Machine™. Combined with a constructed wetland, this living system uses plants, bacteria, algae, snails, and fungi to recycle Omega's wastewater (approximately 72 million gallons to date) into clean water that restores 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™.

OCSL ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION

More than a building, the OCSL is a regional hub for environmental organizations, activists, educators, and students to network and learn through a variety of programs such as: environmental conferences, workshops, and field trips (K-12, college, and post-graduate).

TOURING / VISITING THE BUILDING

From May through October free public tours of the OCSL are offered weekly by OCSL staff. Private tours are available year-round by appointment, to groups of educators, students, contractors, and others who want to learn more about natural water reclamation, sustainable living, and green building. Contact OCSL@eOmega.org for more information about tours.

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

In 2005 Omega's aging septic system needed to be replaced. Instead of going the traditional route with chemicals, Omega wanted to create a natural water reclamation system—that would handle water not as waste, but as a precious resource. After brainstorming with Omega's leading teachers at the top of the environmental and sustainability fields, Omega chose to build an Eco Machine™, a natural "wastewater" treatment system that cleans water by mimicking the systems of the natural world.

Part of the Eco Machine™ needed to be housed by a building. Omega also wanted the building to include a classroom, and be designed in a way that would allow the public to learn about the water reclamation process, witness the latest developments in regenerative design, and take courses that highlight their connection to nature and inspire greater sustainability in their own lives and communities.

To facilitate these educational goals, Omega decided the building should be built to meet the highest standards in sustainable architecture—LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™. To meet one of the prerequisites for the Living Building Challenge, the OCSL was designed to generate and supply all the energy for both the Eco Machine™ and the building, with a zero carbon footprint.

WHAT IS THE LIVING BUILDING CHALLENGE™?

The Omega Center for Sustainable Living was one of the first buildings in the world to achieve full certification under the Living Building Challenge™, the most advanced green building rating system in the world. The OCSL received this designation on October 12, 2010.

The Living Building Challenge™ is 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).

WHAT IS LEED® PLATINUM STATUS?

The Omega Center for Sustainable Living achieved LEED® Platinum certification, the highest green building designation available from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Green Building Rating System™ is an internationally recognized green building certification program. The OCSL received this designation on October 7, 2010.