

AT HOME

WWW.COURANT.COM/ATHOME

FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2008

SECTION H

Sun Seekers Search For Sleeker Solar Designs

By **ANDREW FRIEDMAN**
SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

At a recent American Institute of Architects forum on solar design in New Britain, John Rountree reminded the 90 participants of something: "As architects, we have the ability to be creative," the Westport architect said. "I hope we can look at this as another palette we can use in our buildings."

It may seem like an obvious thing to say, telling the artists of

the built world to be creative. But for anyone who has seen the at-times-awkward photovoltaic panels on a rooftop, a call for a fresh aesthetic approach resounds. Particularly now that the other pieces are in place as never before — an energetic state rebate program, the daily shocker of oil prices, the new technology that varies the look of the panels — architects in Connecticut are beginning to respond with new, sensitive designs.

"Could you say a solar style of

architecture is evolving?" asks Chad Floyd, a partner in the firm Centerbrook Architects. "It would be reasonable to say something like that is afoot. Not necessarily a style, but a way of thinking is definitely evolving."

Certainly the past left something to be desired.

"You've seen those movies about the start of aviation, where people doing these aviation experiments jump off the cliff but crash?" says Trumbull architect Don Watson, who designed the

first residential solar house in Connecticut in 1971 and recently a house in Bridgeport that is seeking LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) gold certification. "It was the same with this new technology. At first some of them

PLEASE SEE **MAKING**, PAGE H5

JAMES WEIL'S rustic, barnboard retirement retreat in Westport has solar panels on its roof.

JOHN ROUNTREE



Picnics Minus Plastic

Earth-Friendly Outdoor Meals

By **KORKY VANN**
SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

A hint of warm weather and suddenly we've got a calendar of outdoor entertaining — dinners on the deck, parties on the patio, cookouts in the yard. But all those alfresco activities can add mountains of disposable dinnerware and party goods to the country's landfills. If you want to picnic like it's Earth Day all summer long, consider some of the greener options available this season.

"When you think about the fact that every plastic fork you've ever used is still out there somewhere, it makes you reconsider your choices," says Starre Vardan, founder and editor of www.eco-chick.com, an environmental website geared toward hip, environmentally savvy women. "Plastic stuff just never breaks down. The good thing is that eco-friendly items are more easily accessible than ever before, and you can find a great selection of things in your local stores."

Vardan, a South Norwalk resident, says Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel, Branch Home, (www.branchhome.com), Trader Joe's and many other companies have added lines featuring organic, recycled, sustainable or recyclable merchandise to their offerings, including disposable tableware that breaks down and biodegrades in 180 days or less; brightly hued plates, cups and flatware made from recycled plastics; bamboo serving pieces in fun, summer colors; and recycled glass vases, glasses, pitchers and carafes.

"Green has gone way beyond beige. Manufacturers are creating merchandise that looks great and is still kind to the planet," says Vardan, whose book, "Eco Chick Guide to Life: How To Be Fabulously Green," will be published by St. Martin's Griffin in August. "You don't have to set your outdoor table with things that scream crunchy granola."

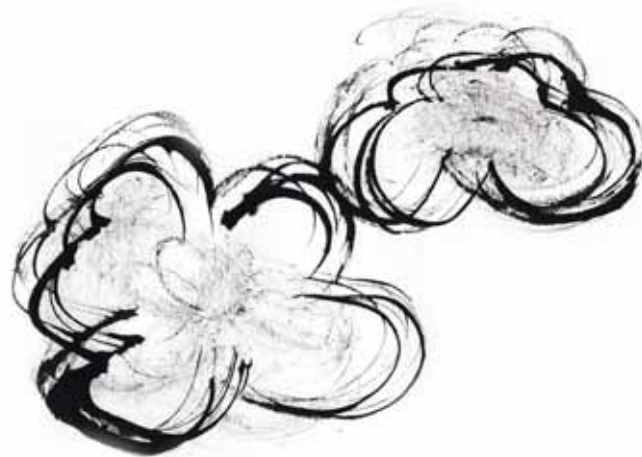
Danny Seo, environmental lifestyle expert and author of "Simply Green Parties," agrees.

"These days you can go green without sacrificing style," he says.

Some of Seo's favorite green outdoor ideas: Purchase a bunch of inexpensive, colorful bandanas and use them for napkins all summer long. Take solar lighting sticks and scatter them around the deck, in planters or even on your patio table. When the sun goes down, they'll throw off a great, soft glow.

If you're serving up hot dogs for a crowd and really want to

PLEASE SEE **ENVIRONMENTALLY**, PAGE H6



Steps To Take Around The House To Lighten Your Carbon Footprint

A Deeper Shade Of Green

By **THERESA SULLIVAN BARGER**
SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

So you recycle religiously; you've switched to CFLs; you keep your tires inflated; you turned down the thermostat all winter; you've weatherstripped and insulated; you use only ecologically responsible cleaning products; and you sleep in sustainably harvested bamboo sheets. Now what?

If you want to take environmentally friendly living to the next level, say lifelong environmentalists, start by rethinking every decision you make from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep.

That means taking shorter showers, making your coffee at home instead of pulling up to the drive-up window — or at least having your own travel mug refilled at the counter. It means switching from disposable water bottles to washable water bottles, using cloth instead of paper napkins. It means packing your lunch in reusable plastic containers instead of disposable sandwich bags, skipping pre-packed lunch foods, and, when possible, telecommuting, taking public transportation or carpooling.

"What I think people ought to be doing is ... take a step back and think of the bigger areas of their lives and how that fits with going green," says Seth Bauer, editorial director of the Green Guide, a quarterly magazine launched in March by National Geographic.

"For example, when we go into a store to

PLEASE SEE **THERE'S**, PAGE H9

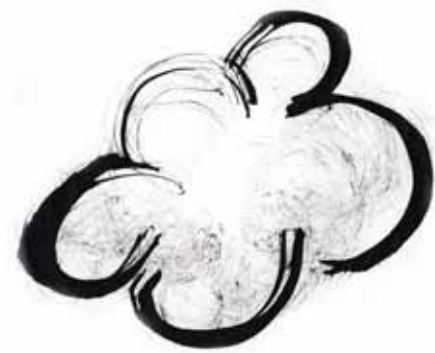


ILLUSTRATION BY ANANDA WALDEN / THE HARTFORD COURANT