

# Book Review:

## ***The Green Museum: A Primer on Environmental Practice.***

Reviewed by *Merritt Price*

**L**ike most museum professionals I find it hard to keep on top of work assignments, let alone think beyond the immediate deadlines to larger goals such as greening my workplace. This book offers practical advice for getting going in the right direction no matter the size of your museum. Its contents are based, as the authors state, “on the experience and knowledge of scores of people who are already greening museums.” (p.xv)

Starting with the introduction my interest was piqued with provocative questions about energy use, air quality and material use. Through the clearly organized chapters the authors address these concerns with concrete ideas and practically written advice for tackling a wide range of green initiatives.

### **Alignment of Green Initiatives with Museum Mission**

In the first chapter, the authors write: “It is an ‘Aha!’ moment when museum staff and board members realize the multiple connections between environmentally responsible practices and their institution’s mission.” (p.2) The following section gave me some practical ideas from the perspective of a concerned department manager: how to position initiatives on a solid business model and how to articulate that going green can save you money; protect the collection for the future; and provide a clean and safe environment for your objects, buildings, staff and visitors. The book also makes a strong point about collections care for museums with nonliving collections; observing that “this charge has a global dimension since the planet is the ultimate housing for collections” and so “paying attention to mitigating global levels of pollution is an important aspect of mission fulfillment for

those in the preservation business.” (p.5) I found myself nodding my head in agreement through the introduction and the first chapter, “The Idea.” Getting the reader on board with the value of green initiatives is the easy part. Turning these ideas into action is the harder part. The book leads the reader through a variety of steps including: the development of policy; providing a framework for evaluating and measuring change; organizing human resources, implementing new initiatives, and sustaining your efforts. On a personal note I’m working with my staff to standardize sizes for exhibition walls and text panels so they can be more easily re-used, and we’re working with our vendors to specify the most eco-friendly substrates and inks for graphics production.

### **Varied and Informative Case Studies**

The book is punctuated with case studies from different museums ranging from a renovation story about a National Trust Historic Site to the Shedd Aquarium’s efforts to go green in Food Service. These are concise and cover a wide range of real-world situations that give encouragement to others, often quoting museum professionals who have already started their trek down the green path.

I was pleased to see the Getty story about measures we’ve taken to attain LEED certification. Since this story was published I’ve been involved in a small green Getty initiative that touched me directly. Having achieved the LEED Silver certification we wanted to herald our achievement and did so in the following ways: we added signage to the main Museum entranceway that calls attention to our certification; we provided Getty Green facts to our Information desk staff so they could answer visitor questions about our

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*The Green Museum: A Primer on Environmental Practice.* By Sarah S. Brody and Elizabeth Wylie. AltaMira Press. 2008. 224 pages. \$27.95 paper.

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*The Green Museum* now has a place in our department library, alongside the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines and other documentation we consult regularly.

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green practices; we looked at the next reprint scheduled for two brochures “Architecture and Gardens Guide” and the “Map & Guide to the Getty Center” and decided to reduce printed materials on site by combining what was previously two printed guides into one. We also added information to this brochure that describes some of our conservation efforts. Since 2001 the Getty has reduced energy consumption by 10 % through alternative transportation incentives, landscaping, innovative lighting plans, irrigation, and green roofs. Our website had content added that elaborates on our green efforts. As an eco-minded individual it is heartening to work at an institution that is concerned about creating a greener place and with communicating mission-connected messages about conservation that might encourage visitors to change their own practices.

#### **Some Missed Opportunities**

On occasion the content is repetitive, using the same example twice. This made me wonder if the authors were trying to stretch the information to fulfill a word count target. Additionally, I’ve always followed the adage that a good exhibition—a good story—has a clear beginning, middle and end. This book starts out strong with Chapter 1, “The Idea,” and follows

with an information-filled how-to middle section. Unfortunately there isn’t a good ending. For me the book trailed off rather than ending with a provocative summary or call to action.

Returning to the book after a period of time I stopped for a moment to drink in the jacket design and gave the cover image a thumbs-down for generating interest and communicating anything about the content held within. I found it curious that there is no mention in the colophon about recycled paper being used for this book, especially since the authors mention the importance of communicating to others about your green efforts and successes.

#### **A Valuable Addition to the Museum Library**

Despite these few missteps, this book is a useful addition to the reference section of any museum library. The back matter in the book includes an extensive listing of resources (articles, books, websites, products, materials, and organizations) to help you in greening your museum. *The Green Museum* now has a place in our department library, alongside the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines and other documentation we consult regularly. It should be considered core reading for anyone involved in green initiatives. ☀