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Something BORROWED

ARCHITECT NINA EDWARDS ANKER SWIFTLY ADVANCES THE CONVERSATION ON SUSTAINABLE DESIGN.

WRITTEN BY HEATHER CARNEY / PHOTOGRAPHY BY LESLEY UNRUH

Leave it to Nina Edwards Anker to design a residence that personifies sustainability. The New York-based architect received her doctorate from The Oslo School of Architecture and Design leading to her acclaimed Southampton project, Cocoon House. Here, Anker opens the doors to her Gold LEED-certified home and forward-thinking approach to the built environment.

What was your biggest takeaway from studying in Norway? The minimalist aesthetic really resonates with me. Norwegian Pritzker Prize-winning architect Sverre Fehn made structures nestled into the landscape. I was drawn to the contrast between the little homes set against the vast water and snowscapes. That shaped my attitude as to how architecture relates to nature.

Let's talk about the Cocoon House and its unusual curved shape! I was inspired by a yurt in Vermont. I'm interested in how we can use scientific technologies to do what our ancestors did. One of my favorite times of year in the house is a sunny winter day, sitting in a T-shirt in the living room with no heat on and it's still so warm. These ancient typologies worked for a reason.

Your perspective focuses on affect before effect. The starting point is you have a family member with a health issue—in this case, my son has asthma—and you address that before anything else, so the house is a purely timber 'breathable' structure. It's better for breathability and for the climate in terms of CO2 release.

So health and sustainability go hand-in-hand? How we address our spaces in terms of well-being and the environment should be in sync. The orientation of the site, breezes, sunlight, lack of clutter—that's all wellness.

Share another example of a well-designed LEED-certified building. I love the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Visitor Center. It's a gateway between the urban and natural landscape. Just because it's sustainable, doesn't mean it needs to be overly technical or intimidating.

What's next? My book on the Cocoon House launches in August. I'm also working on the Flora and Fauna Extinction Project, making furnishings inspired by plants going extinct in the natural world.



In the hallway of the Cocoon House, translucent colored skylights are designed to enhance the experience in each space. Colors range from vermilion red, signaling sunset and rest, above the master bedroom, to deep yellow, indicating zenith and activity, near the living room.