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Design on the Edge: The Making of a High-Performance Building

David W. Orr

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The story of the Adam Joseph Lewis Center at Oberlin College--the first substantially green building to be built on a college campus--encompasses more than the particulars of one building. In Design on the Edge, David Orr writes about the planning and design of Oberlin's environmental studies building as part of a larger story about the art and science of ecological design and the ability of institutions of higher learning themselves to learn.The Lewis Center, which has attracted worldwide attention as a model of ecological design, operates according to environmental principles. It is powered entirely by solar energy, features landscaping with fruit trees and vegetable gardens, and houses a Living Machine, which processes all wastewater for reuse in the building or landscape. Orr puts the Lewis Center into historical design context and describes the obstacles and successes he encountered in obtaining funds and college approval, interweaving the particulars of the center with thoughts on the larger environmental and societal issues the building process illustrates.Equal parts analysis, personal reflection, and call to action, Design on the Edge illustrates the process of institutional change, institutional learning, and the political economy of design. It describes how the idea of the Lewis Center originated and was translated into reality with the help of such environmental visionaries as William McDonough and John Todd, and how the building has performed since its completion.College and university administrators will spend 17 billion dollars on new buildings over the next few years. Design on the Edge is essential reading for architects, planners, and environmentalists who need to sell the innovations of ecological design to wary institutions, and for educators and students whose profession is undermined by the very buildings they work in--and for anyone who has ever tried to change an organization for the better.

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