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A High-Rise for Bats Is a Natural Pesticide Program

September 14, 2010 • 4:30 pm PDT

8



ALISSA WALKER

*A writer, a gelato-eater
and a walker in LA*

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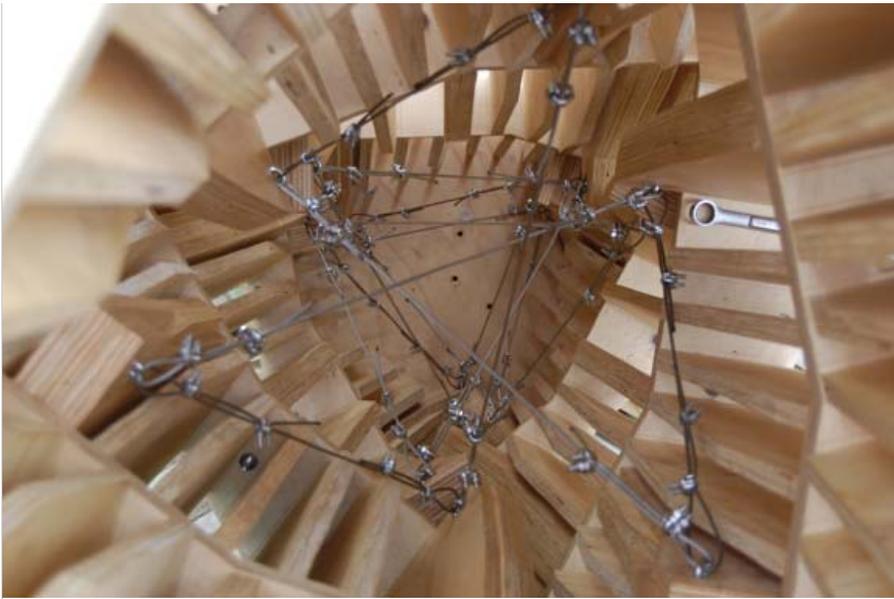
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Bats are better known for their blood-sucking, vampire-morphing qualities than they are for their ability to help humans. But according to University at Buffalo professor Joyce Hwang, they're some of the most vital animals in our ecosystem: The flying mammals are natural pest-control teams—effective predators of potentially harmful but mostly annoying insects like mosquitoes—and also manage to pollinate flowers. So Hwang designed the Bat Tower, a structure that would encourage bats to concentrate their pest-fighting skills in a specific area.



The 12-foot bat apartment building is filled with tiny crevices made from plywood and dimensional lumber and was constructed with Hwang's students. The dark wood panels on the roof of the structure heat up in the sun to provide a warm, dark place for bats to go after dusk. The team also planted spicy herbs like chives and oregano that would attract bats to the area (maybe the whole garlic-warding-off-vampires isn't exactly right).

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If you think the Bat Tower looks more like a piece of art than a bat high-rise, you're right. The structure is actually a piece of sculpture, part of

Griffis Sculpture Park in upstate New York. Hwang received a \$10,000 grant from New York State Council on the Arts to address her specific statement on the relationship between architecture and ecology.



The structure will be dedicated on October 2 and if all goes well, the bats will be moved in by Halloween. But even if bats don't take a liking to it right away, the Bat Tower does serve as a valuable piece of bat PR, educating people that the flying mammals are indeed a valuable part of the local ecosystem. In fact, says Hwang, bats are suffering from something called white-nose syndrome, a deadly disease which scientists have been unable to explain. It may have something to do with toxins—which could, ironically, possibly be related to pesticides—in the caves they hibernate in.

As she waits for her bat friends to move in, Hwang is working on other architectural ways to draw bats close to our homes, like a Pest Wall that would work vertically on the outside of a building, or a Pest Pavilion, an entire building with crevices around the exterior to attract our new favorite neighbors. For those in the area, a Bat Tower dedication and hike is scheduled for October 2.



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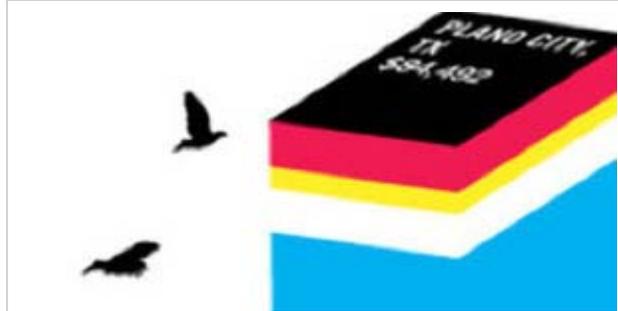


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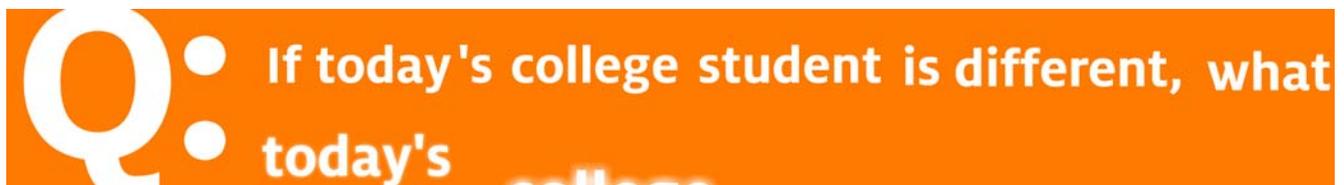


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