

omega center for sustainable living

ABOUT OMEGA INSTITUTE (HOME OF THE OCSL)

Omega Institute is the nation's leading center for holistic studies. As a nonprofit organization, Omega offers diverse and innovative educational experiences that inspire an integrated approach to personal and social change. Located on 250 acres in New York's beautiful Hudson Valley, and listed as one of *1,000 Places to See in the USA & Canada Before You Die*, Omega is considered a premier travel destination for workshops, conferences, retreats and professional training. Omega's renowned faculty and presenters have included Maya Angelou, Thích Nhất Hạnh, Jane Goodall, Pema Chödrön, Bobby McFerrin, Eckhart Tolle, Gloria Steinem, Phil Jackson, and many other creative, talented teachers and thought leaders. Annually, more than 15,000 people attend Omega's 300+ programs in-person, and the organization reaches approximately 2 million people online.

As an environmental steward, Omega is dedicated to mitigating its environmental impact, and to teaching others how to adopt sustainable living practices. Since 1977, Omega has hosted scores of environmental conferences, and workshops focused on regenerative principles that restore and benefit the environment. Past presenters have included Wangari Maathai, Bill McKibben, Vandana Shiva, John Todd, Winona LaDuke, Jeremy Rifkin, Pete Seeger, and many more.

WHAT ARE OMEGA'S SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS?

Omega considers the environmental impact of its purchasing and operations as part of an ongoing commitment to stewardship. The campus supports conservation, recycling, and composting programs, and all takeout containers at the Omega Café are compostable. Omega's Food & Beverage team sources largely from regional growers, supporting sustainable agriculture and local businesses. By using its own purchasing power, educational capacity, and commitment to sustainability, Omega is demonstrating creative ways to meet environmental challenges. The Omega Center for Sustainable Living (OCSL) reflects this commitment, and serves as a leading example of Omega's environmental work.

WHAT IS THE OCSL?

The OCSL is an environmental education center that demonstrates and teaches what is possible through regenerative thinking and design. Operating since 2009, the OCSL integrates the campus's state-of-the-art Eco-Machine™ (natural water reclamation facility) with a robust environmental education program. The award-winning OCSL

building was the first in the U.S. to achieve both LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™ certification – the highest environmental performance standards available. It brings together wastewater recycling, clean energy, and other sustainability elements that can be replicated. More than a building, the OCSL is a regional hub for environmental organizations, activists, educators, and students to network and learn through a variety of programs such as: environmental conferences, workshops, and field trips (K-12, college, and post-graduate).

WHY DID OMEGA BUILD ITS ECO MACHINE™ AND THE OCSL?

In 2005 Omega's aging septic system needed to be replaced. Instead of simply installing a new septic system, Omega wanted to create a different kind of water treatment system—one that would handle water not as waste, but as a precious resource. After brainstorming with Omega teachers at the top of the environmental and sustainability fields, Omega chose to build an Eco Machine™, a natural “wastewater” treatment system that cleans water by mimicking the systems of the natural world.

Part of the Eco Machine™ needed to be housed by a building. Omega also wanted the building to include a classroom, and be designed in a way that would allow the public to learn about the water reclamation process, witness the latest developments in regenerative design, and take courses that highlight their connection to nature and inspire greater sustainability in their own lives and communities. To facilitate these educational goals, Omega decided the building should be built to meet the highest standards in sustainable architecture—LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™. To meet one of the prerequisites for the Living Building Challenge, the OCSL was designed to generate and supply all the energy for both the Eco Machine™ and the building, with a zero carbon footprint.

OCSL BUILDING

The award-winning OCSL building was the first in the U.S. to achieve both LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™ certification—the highest environmental performance standards available. It brings together wastewater recycling, renewable energy, and other sustainability elements that can be replicated. Designed by the renowned firm BNIM Architects, the OCSL also demonstrates environmental leadership through its carbon neutral operations and by supplying all of its energy needs. It is heated and cooled using geothermal systems, as well as by drawing photovoltaic power from its solar array.

The core of the facility is a 4,500-square-foot greenhouse containing a water filtration system called the Eco Machine™. Combined with a constructed wetland, this living system uses plants, fungi, algae, bacteria, snails, and other organisms to recycle Omega's wastewater into clean water that restores the aquifer. The system is chemical free, uses zero net energy, and creates a closed loop hydrological cycle. John Todd Ecological Design is the architecture firm that created the Eco Machine™.

TOURING / VISITING THE BUILDING

From late May through October free public tours of the OCSL are offered weekly by OCSL staff. Private tours are available year-round by appointment, to groups of educators, students, contractors, and others who want to learn more about natural water reclamation, sustainable living, and green building. Contact OCSL@eOmega.org for more information about tours.

WHAT IS THE LIVING BUILDING CHALLENGE™?

The OCSL was one of the first buildings in the world to achieve full certification under the Living Building Challenge™, the most advanced green building rating system in the world. The OCSL received this designation on October 12, 2010. The Living Building Challenge™ is a program of the International Living Future Institute. The Living Building Challenge™ was launched by the Cascadia Green Building Council (a chapter of both the U.S. Green Building Council and Canada Green Building Council).

WHAT IS LEED® PLATINUM STATUS?

The OCSL achieved LEED® Platinum certification, the highest green building designation available from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Green Building Rating System™ is an internationally recognized green building certification program. The OCSL received this designation on October 7, 2010.