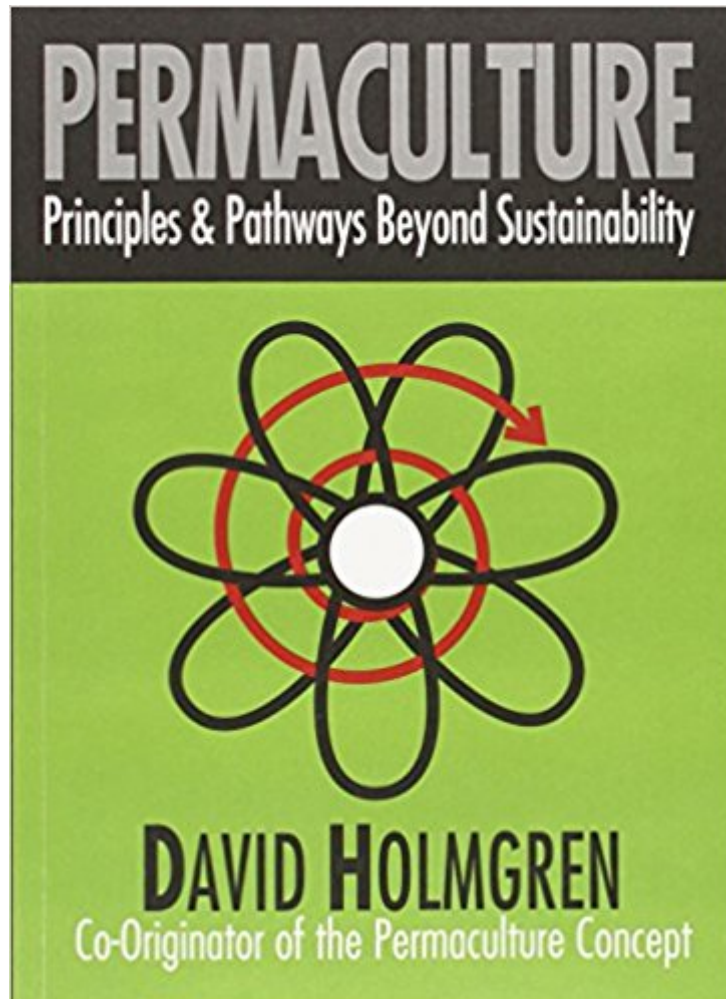


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Permaculture: Principles And Pathways Beyond Sustainability



Synopsis

David Holmgren brings into sharper focus the powerful and still evolving Permaculture concept he pioneered with Bill Mollison in the 1970s. It draws together and integrates 25 years of thinking and teaching to reveal a whole new way of understanding and action behind a simple set of design principles. The 12 design principles are each represented by a positive action statement, an icon and a traditional proverb or two that captures the essence of each principle. Holmgren draws a correlation between every aspect of how we organize our lives, communities and landscapes and our ability to creatively adapt to the ecological realities that shape human destiny. For students and teachers of Permaculture this book provides something more fundamental and distilled than Mollison's encyclopedic Designers Manual. For the general reader it provides refreshing perspectives on a range of environmental issues and shows how permaculture is much more than just a system of gardening. For anyone seriously interested in understanding the foundations of sustainable design and culture, this book is essential reading. Although a book of ideas, the big picture is repeatedly grounded by reference to Holmgren's own place, Melliodora, and other practical examples.

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Customer Reviews

This book has rekindled my interest in Permaculture. The author, David Holmgren, is the co-creator, with Bill Mollison of the term "permaculture", and the co-author of the original permaculture book, Permaculture One. Now, some 25 years after that seminal book, Holmgren has written a timely

and comprehensive synthesis that brings permaculture principles together in an exiting new way. The book highlights our place at a unique moment in history: at the peak of the global oil production curve; at the beginning of the end of cheap fossil energy. This is, for me, the book's most compelling motif: it positions permaculture as a strategy for a future of inevitable "energy descent". Although Holmgren hints that this energy descent may take any number of horrific pathways, he appears to have chosen the term "descent" as a hopeful alternative to collapse, crash, or die off. Holmgren insightfully points out that is not just our reserves of fossil fuel that we've been burning through. Since the Reagan/Thatcher years, he claims, global capitalism has been on a frenzy of job cutting and "just-in-time" inventory reduction. This amounts to a destruction of the embedded intelligence and a severe draw-down of the capital stocks of our institutions: a severe loss of embedded energy. Furthermore, he worries that due to privatization and short-term bottom-line thinking, maintenance on our built-environment and physical infrastructure has been neglected: another huge loss of embedded energy.

This is for me a very important book, one of a handful that joins the Ecological Economics volumes crafted by Herman Daly and others, and also the Natural Capitalism endeavors of Paul Hawkin, Anthony Lovins. The author excels at rendering logical, sequential, and integrated concepts, all of which lead us to the inevitable conclusion--as the author intends--that human intellect, social networks, an appreciation for diversity as the foundation for cross-fertilization, and the enormous potential of the five billion poor--all suggest that a non-technological renaissance may be upon us, and that the bottom-up action of many minds could yet destroy the still-prevailing industrial, top-down control, centralizing of wealth through violence, and externalization of "true cost" to the unwitting public that no longer understands history or that the prevailing shadowy coalitions of bankers, corporate chieftains, private armies, spies, criminals, and terrorists. My greatest surprise came at the very end, where the author provides a post-9/11 epilogue, and says: "There is abundant evidence that September 11 was an outcome of these shadowy coalitions, which link global energy corporations, US foreign policy, the global "intelligence community," Islamic fundamentalists, arms dealers, and illegal drug trade. Discussion of this bizarre symbiosis [elsewhere he puns on 'Bush Laden'] remains beyond the pale of mainstream media....and is the best example of the paralysis of public discourse due to an absence of language to comprehend top-down thinking and bottom-up action as a new mode of power [sustainable community-oriented end-user driven values and behavior and investments].

That the world we now live in is unsustainable goes without saying. Our skyrocketing population puts enormous pressure on the productive and absorptive capacities of the land, outstripping the natural carrying capacity of the planet by some twenty percent (see *Radical Simplicity*, by Jim Merkel). In effect, we are stealing away the life of the planet and the life of future generations. As ever more fisheries collapse, forests shrink, rangelands deteriorate, soils erode, species vanish, temperatures rise, rivers run dry, water tables fall, ozone depletion expands and polar ice caps melt across the globe, the single most important question humanity has faced resonates ever louder: How can we live sustainably? Amid the cacophony of scholarly and political debate surrounding this issue, the hushed emergence of permaculture has by and large gone unnoticed. Defined as the use of systems thinking and design principles to consciously design "landscapes which mimic the patterns and relationships found in nature, while yielding an abundance of food, fibre and energy for provision of local needs," the permaculture concept is nothing less than the science of sustainability. And since the joint publication of *Permaculture One: A Perennial Agricultural System for Human Settlements* (now out of print) by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the mid-seventies, permaculture has become a veritable movement - a legitimate answer to the environmental and agricultural crises which plague humanity. Unfortunately, for the past twenty-five years, those who wished to learn more about permaculture were limited to joining expensive seminars and workshops, thereby ensuring marginal public exposure. All of this has changed, though, with the publication of this book.

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