Luxury Living

Narendra Patel — Turning The Desert Green

Architect Narendra Patel is doing his part to make the desert green. A leading proponent of "green architecture," he is bringing his environmentally conscious ethos to both residential and commercial projects.

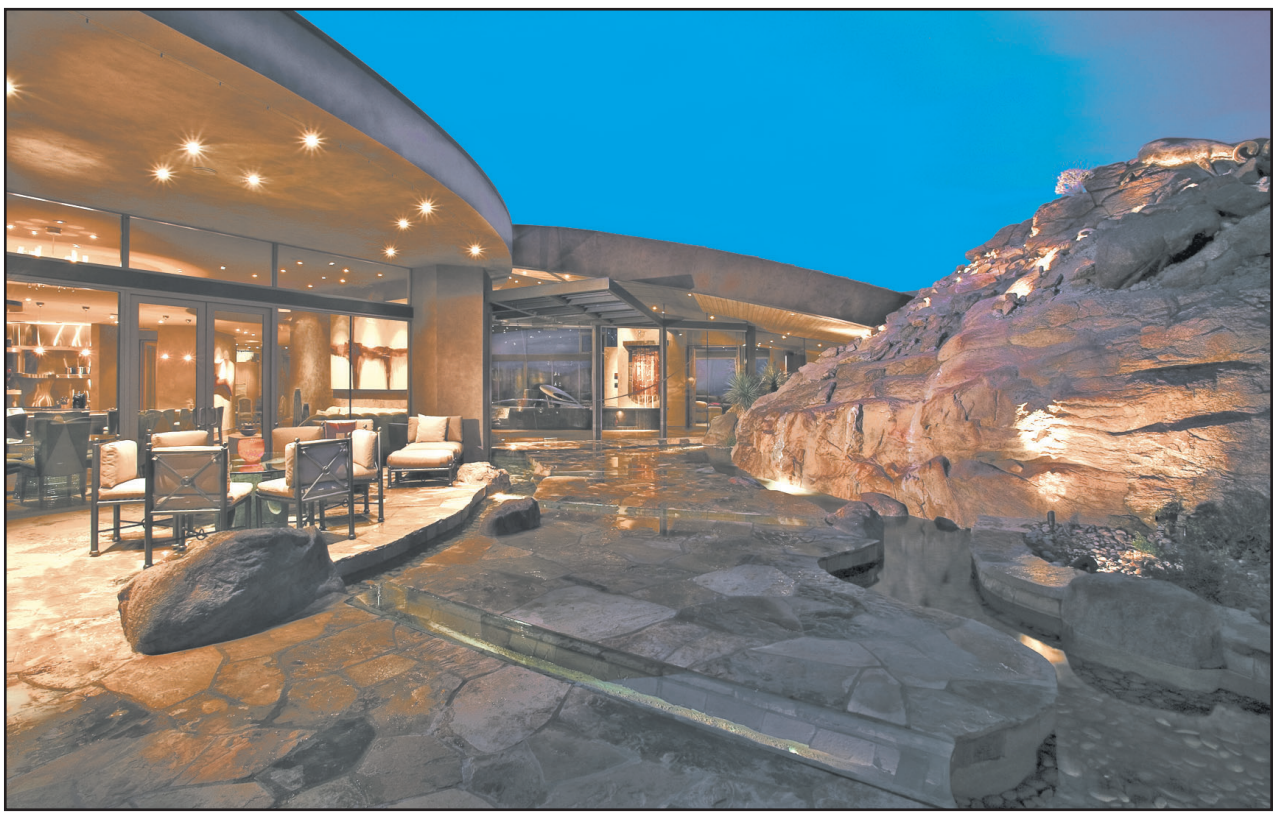
Rancho Mirage-based Patel doesn't do green because of the desert environment he loves, but because it's the right thing to do. "That's our main strategy," Patel says, "to do what's good for the environment, nationally and globally. To design buildings that reduce the burden on energy consumption and the non-renewable resources (like water) we consume when we build.

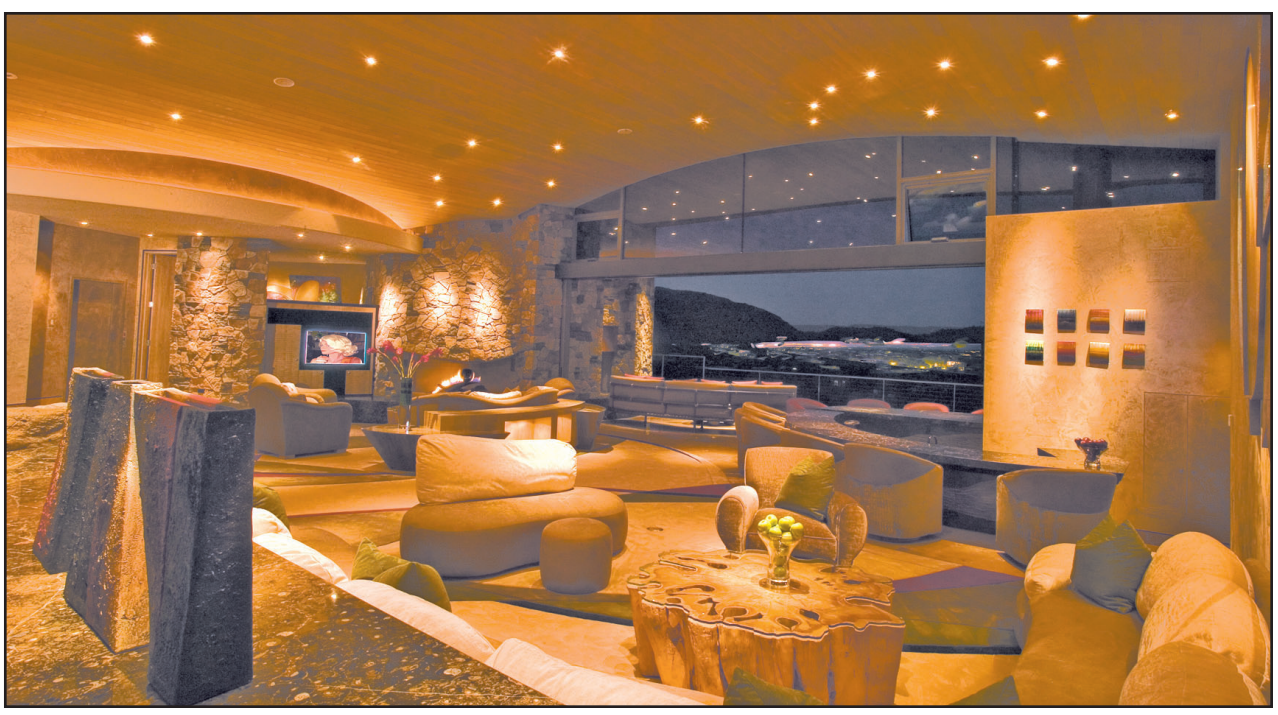
"We know that construction is the second-leading polluter after the auto industry," Patel adds. So his firm does its best to mitigate that polution by designing and developing projects that are not only energy efficient and energy independent, but that leave the smallest carbon footprint, and use recycled, renewable materials.

"Our goal is to design buildings that eventually will not consume energy, but will produce their own."

The home pictured here has green concepts implemented to their full extent, Patel notes. Solar orientation, water-conserving native landscaping and a "super-insulated building envelope" are just some of the features.

The natural air circulation system with motorized operable windows in this home keeps the interior air quality at a healthy level, and cuts the energy cost at the same time. The solar photovoltaic panels on the roof reduce the building's energy use and reduce carbon dioxide emissions.





In this Narendra Patel home, the existing rock outcropping at the entry courtyard was preserved; the guest house and entry area were designed around it. In the great room, natural light penetrates the space through clerestory windows.

The site's the thing

When Patel asked the owners of this home what they liked most about their land, they said, "When you look around from the site, you feel you're floating, able to look at the views all around; and we want a house that captures that feeling."

Patel sketched a plan that integrated the setting and design of the house. It was the 180-degree view over the valley that provided the inspiration.

"The site is the the first thing that drives the ultimate design; everything has to be appropriate for the site," Patel says.

After he conducts micro-studies of the setting, Patel determines the wind direction and how the home will be positioned to maximize the views, and before going into eco-savvy "aggressive features."

"I want to orient a home to take advantage of the sun. You not only have to know how to protect a home with overhangs, but also where to place the solar panels."

'Eco-tech' goes beyond green

Patel is the desert's leading proponent of what he terms "eco-tech," the combination of architecture technology and ecology.

His projects are eco-friendly in terms of technology, material and engineering and take that to a whole new level

"I believe that because it's eco-suitable, it doesn't have to look boring; because it's energy-efficient, it has to look inspiring first."

An example of this, Patel says, is the Henderson Community Center, built for the city of Palm Desert (pictured next page, middle right).

He was principal architect of the building which has massive thermally-insulated concrete walls juxtaposed against glass structures. It represents Patel's philosophy of working with the climate, instead of against it, illustrating a primary idea that architecture should respond to its location.

"The architecture of the new building, from the ground up, is derived from suitable ideas for healthier interior spaces," Patel explains. Superficial facades were never considered a viable design alternative for the project. Instead, all concrete wall surfaces are exposed (not painted), designed to showcase the honest form, structure and skeleton of the building for what it is.

Patel is also taking green to the hospitality industry, working on projects like hotels, spas and a wellness center. "There's more opportunity for us; there has not been much thought to making those buildings green."

He's likewise bringing his message to an international level in his design for the Mayland Seaside Hotel in Guangzhou, China. It is now billed as "the greenest hotel in the world" (pictured next page, top right). "China is a hot area right now," Patel comments. "And there is much talk about making it energy-independent.

Described as "zero carbon" or "net zero," the hotel is designed so that carbon emissions are offset by generating energy through non-carbon-emitting means. "The building will produce more renewable energy onsite on an annual basis than any non-renewable energy it consumes," Patel says.

That will make it the first to do so in the world. When it opens in 2010, the Mayland Seaside Hotel is expected to be the most energy-efficient Five-Star hotel ever built.

Getting the message out

"My clients are successful, brilliant entrepreneurs who understand the benefits and advantages of these features," Patel says. "Usually they agree to incorporate these into their projects. Sometimes they initiate incorporating features, and we enhance them even further. Often we'll add or suggest something they've never thought of. When we explain what the benefits are, it's quite enlightening.

Additionally, clients know Patel will use natural materials predominantly—stone and rock, lots of glass and usually a water feature. Natural metals—copper, stainless steel and bronze—are another element, and "natural" even applies to color,

"I try to work with the natural pigments of the desert, to bring outside elements in. And we detail so flawlessly, you can't tell where the inside ends and the outside begins."

Into the future

Patel was the principal architect for Alta, a gated community of luxury homes on 30 acres in the southwest corner of Palm Springs.

"The idea behind Alta is to have respect for what