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Cool Intentions

Architect Narendra Patel brings sustainability to the desert.

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Narendra Patel uses green building methods in his California desert houses. This page: Diamond Residence at Bighorn Golf Club in Palm Desert. Opposite: Eagle's Wings, also at Bighorn Golf Club, was built around natural rock formations.



“**W**E WANTED TO BE PART of a positive impact,” says architect Narendra Patel, who has been using green methods to build his signature California desert houses for the better part of his career. “We have an obligation to do everything we can to use sustainable design—it’s good for the environment, the country and the world.” With the recent rapid developments in green technology, Patel is already retrofitting eco-friendly houses he built a decade ago with even greener elements. “I wish I had been able to employ photovoltaic panels and fuel cell technology 10 years ago,” he says. “But luckily, these things can be added to houses fairly easily.”

Born in India, educated in Canada and trained in the south of France (“doing cookie-cutter *maison* Provence projects”), Patel began experimenting with modern touches—simple lines, floor-to-ceiling glass—early in his practice. After settling in the California desert community of Rancho Mirage, he combined his brand of modernism with a heavy use of wood and stone conducive to the setting, and his particular style was born. It wasn’t long before Patel incorporated photovoltaic (solar) panels, recycled and recyclable building materials, natural ventilation systems designed to reduce energy consumption, and low-VOC (volatile organic compound) finishes.

At Eagle’s Wings and Diamond Residence—two Patel houses located in the private Palm Desert golf community of **Bighorn**—natural materials are celebrated and integrated into the design, rather than dug out and cast off the jobsite. In a reverent nod to early modernists Wright

and Lautner, in some places the houses are built around boulders that occur naturally in the landscape. The homes are low-slung, with sweeping wood ceilings dappled with soffit lighting resembling a starry night sky—a not-atypical look for the area, but memorably executed and powered, in part, by the sun.

“The first question some clients ask is, ‘How much more is this going to cost?’” notes Patel, who himself lives in a green home. “We explain all the economical advantages; for example, photovoltaic panels require an initial investment, but within six years they are paid for, with residents then looking at free electricity for the rest of their lives,” he says. “My clients are very intelligent people. Once they understand the whole picture, most of them agree to incorporate the features.”

In addition to his residential commissions, Patel is at work on several commercial projects, including the Henderson Community Center in Palm Desert, which will seek Platinum LEED certification, and a five-star hotel located in Guangzhou, China, on track to being the greenest one of its kind in the world. Expected

to be finished in two years, the Mayland Seaside Hotel “will actually make more energy than it consumes,” he says.

“You can have luxury and reduce your carbon footprint at the same time,” continues Patel. “We are facing environmental problems right now. As an architect, I feel it is my responsibility to do something about it rather than just talk about it.” ☐

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MAYLAND SEASIDE HOTEL, GUANGZHOU, CHINA



HENDERSON COMMUNITY BUILDING,
PALM DESERT, CA