



Ecobuild in eight hours



All the products may be sustainable, but where on earth do you start? **ROGER HUNT** picks his show highlights and suggests a diary for the day.

For me Ecobuild is a must. Ever since the show was launched in 2005 at the QEII Conference Centre with just 50 exhibitors and 1,000 visitors it's had a firm place in my diary. But there's a problem: the annual challenge of seeing the ever growing number of stands and attending the mass of seminars and conferences; let alone snatching a much needed coffee with the many colleagues I meet along the way.

This year, the organisers promise over 1,300 exhibitors and 600 speakers. What's more the show has moved across London from Earl's Court to the cavernous ExCeL so, if like me you're one of the predicted 50,000 visitors, it poses the biggest challenges yet; not merely of getting there but of making the best use of what's billed as 'the world's biggest event for sustainable design, construction and the built environment'.

With 60,000m² of ground to cover in at most an eight-hour day – on Thursday Ecobuild is only open for six hours – I'm planning ahead. First off I'm heading straight for the pair of Passivhaus compliant homes being constructed by the UK SIPS Association.

More than 50 Passivhaus projects are currently underway in the UK and many more have been designed using Passivhaus principles. I've seen some and am looking forward to seeing the pair at the show, modeled on a live Passivhaus scheme of 38 homes being built for Saxon Weald Housing Association in Sussex. In the Passivhaus pavilion over 35 suppliers will be represented,

so it's a great opportunity to learn more about this increasingly popular standard.

I've always considered Bill Dunster's latest projects from his eco house stable a must see at Ecobuild. Slightly quirky, they make a lot of sense and few people are more passionate about eco design than Dunster. His RuralZed, launched at Ecobuild 2008, is now a reality in the marketplace. This year he's launching a straw board house, StramitZED. A joint venture between ZEDfactory and Stramit Technology Group, it can be built for £135,000; £20,000 less than the normal cost of constructing a Code 6 house.

Looking at different building systems is one of the inspiring aspects of Ecobuild. Cygnum Timber Frame's new closed panel construction system is designed to guarantee improved thermal and acoustic performance and air tightness.

As a counterpoint to timber, Hanson UK's guided tours through a series of five zones, explain how the processes involved in the production of concrete and heavy masonry, and the use of those materials in construction projects, are evolving in sympathy with creating a more sustainable built environment.

But let's get back to basics with a visit to a few of the 130 free seminars on offer. Chaired by Nick Jones, associate director, Inbuilt, the session entitled 'Regulation route map' kicks off with him providing a snapshot of building standards and regulations: 'New coalition government.

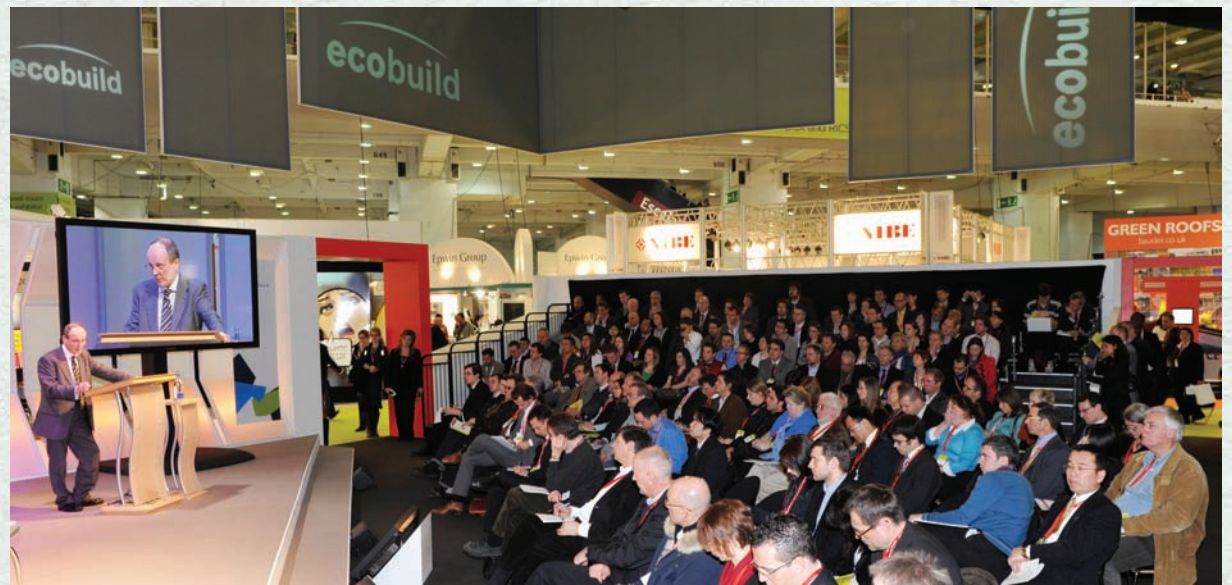




ECOHOUSE



ABOVE: StramitZED terracing
(www.zedfactory.com)



Where we are and where we are going?

When I think about pioneers in sustainability, Sweden is high on the list – its Nordic climate a driving force for architects and builders – so the seminar ‘Sustainability from Sweden’ offers fascinating potential. It includes ‘Hammarby “Sea City” and Malmo Western Harbour – what a sustainable future looks like’ a session by Monica von Schmalensee, the chair of the Swedish Green Building Council and CEO of White Arkitekter. I’ve long followed both these developments and they show just what can be achieved when there’s real determination.

Back on the show’s floor, a quick dash round the many Ecobuild regulars takes in the likes of Daikin, Ideal Standard, Wienerberger, Dimplex Renewables, Velux, Kingspan, Natural Building Technologies, Lafarge and many more.

Foot sore and with the minutes ticking it’s time for energy – renewable energy. It’s one of the most hotly debated subjects on the sustainability agenda and with the Renewable Heat Incentive due in June, the exhibitors in this sector are key. ICS Heat Pump Technology has the latest in DeLonghi heat pumps and NIBE its new F370 generation heat pumps.

Until now, pellet fed boilers and combined heat and power units have generally been rather gruesome bits of kit, best hidden away, so the Baxi Group display is enticing. It offers both the Baxi Bioflo, a free-standing, pellet fed boiler for insulation in living areas, and the Baxi Ecogen. This claims to be the first, commercially available micro-CHP unit for the home. It can generate up to 1kWh of electricity, while providing space heating and hot water.

Solar power has always had a prominent place at Ecobuild. A visit to the ‘Solar Hub’ offers demonstrations and talks from Solarcentury on building integrated photovoltaic tiles and photovoltaic systems and a good place to get an update on the Feed-in Tariff.

The other key area is retrofit so ‘Renew at Ecobuild’ with its advice and demonstrations that focus on the subject is a must. More enlightenment comes in the form of the ‘Refurbishing Britain’ stream of seminars. One I’ve singled out is ‘Refurbishing the social housing stock: the journey so far, lessons learnt and the challenges ahead’.

One would imagine things couldn’t get much ‘greener’ but ‘Ecobuild Cityscape’ focuses on greening the city and enhancing biodiversity. These themes are integral to the liveability of the urban realm and the talks and demonstrations are all about gaining confidence in decision-making – it’s what Ecobuild is all about.

Time for a coffee? Not yet, because amongst the cafes in the main concourse area between the two exhibition halls, Ecobuild’s ‘Water Wise’ must not be missed. It’s a chance to understand the water efficient systems and appliances that can be installed.

Now it really is time to change gear: Ecobuild’s conference line up is impressive. ‘A vision of the future: green buildings, green construction, green jobs’ catches my eye but perhaps the most apt at the end of a long day immersed in all kinds of eco rhetoric is ‘Can science save us?’ The speaker is Brian Cox, described on the Ecobuild website as ‘professor of particle physics at Manchester University, TV presenter and author’ and in the *Daily Mail* as ‘the pop star turned pin-up professor’.