

My Interview with William McDonough Venture Capitalist and Author of *Cradle to Cradle*

Your humble editor first met internationally renowned designer Bill McDonough at the Bridges to Light Symposium hosted by the LRC in October, 2003. McDonough was named Time Magazine's 'Hero of the Planet' and has received the Presidential Medal for Sustainable Development.



At the Bridges meeting he challenged the lighting industry to eliminate mercury from our products as he poked and harassed the audience; it was a very effective style of presentation. One CEO from a major lamp manufacturer squirmed throughout the meeting, but was especially uncomfortable when Bill pressed lamp companies about using mercury in their products. "Why do you use mercury in your lamps? Why do you pollute our groundwater?" It was great!

Below are highlights from his speech this week to the CleanTech Venture Capital Forum in Washington. After his speech, I briefly sat with him and asked a few questions.

- He is the author of *Cradle to Cradle* which is printed on plastic. "Why would I chop down a tree and flatten it to print my book? 5000 years after papyrus was discovered, it seems ridiculous to cut down a tree for a book."
- Discussed how fundamentally and remarkably the design of a tree is. It cleans air, creates oxygen, creates micro climates, and is a habitat to hundreds of species. If that's not enough, it can change colors!
- How do we love all the children of all the species all the time? Our goal is a delightfully diverse, safe, healthy and just world, with clean air, water, soil and power—economically, equitably, ecologically and elegantly enjoyed.
- If you don't take the king, you are just moving pieces around the board.
- China is quickly implementing *Cradle to Cradle* practices. Lizhou, China is a new city being built under the *Cradle to Cradle* concept.
- The world must get solar below the price of coal. If Chinese take solar to scale, it will dramatically drop price of solar. Buildings are being built now which are solar compatible. If solar prices drop, these buildings will be easy to convert. Assuming solar development and production move to China, US should not be upset. For every job created to manufacture solar products, four jobs are created for installation. It will be a massive job creation in US.

Ed: Bill, that was a very nice presentation. I interviewed you almost exactly two years ago at the Bridges to Light Symposium hosted by the LRC.

Bill: Sure, I remember the symposium. Govi Rao (Philips Lighting) invited me.

Ed: I remember it well, too. You really challenged the audience on mercury. Your presentation had a profound effect and I think it encouraged our industry to begin taking sustainability serious. IESNA has formed a Sustainable Lighting Committee and is working on a document. Were you aware of that?

Bill: I think I may have heard about it, but don't have any details.

Ed: Since you gave your talk to our industry two years ago, have you seen any improvement from lighting?

Bill: I have seen some improvement, but not enough. There are a few things that excite me.

Ed: Anything you are willing to invest in?

Bill: Maybe, there are a few people doing some things...

Ed: ...may I ask who you like?

Bill: You can ask!!! (he laughs) We're still doing our due diligence at this point. Got to go, say hello to Govi.

So, Govi, hello from Bill.