

The New York Times

IN THE GARDEN

# Growing From Underground

By MICHAEL TORTORELLO

**A**S a way to save the world, digging a ditch next to a hillcock of sheep dung would seem to be a modest start. Granted, the ditch was not just a ditch. It was meant to be a "swale," an earthwork for slowing the flow of water down a slope on a hobby farm in western Wisconsin.

And the trenchers, far from being day laborers, had paid \$1,300 to \$1,500 for the privilege of working their spades on a cement-skied Tuesday morning in late June.

Fourteen of us had assembled to learn permaculture, a simple system for designing sustainable human settlements, restoring soil, planting year-round food landscapes, conserving water, redirecting the waste stream, forming more companionable communities and, if everything went according to plan, turning the earth's looming resource crisis into a new age of happiness.

It was going to have to be a pretty awesome ditch.

That was the sense I took away from

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After years on the margins, the eco-ideology known as permaculture enters the mainstream.

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auditing four days of a weeklong Permaculture Design Certificate course led by Wayne Weiseman, 58, the director of the Permaculture Project, in Carbondale, Ill.

The movement's founders, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, coined the term permaculture in the mid-1970s, as a portmanteau of permanent agriculture and



# Knocked Off His Feet

Footstools welcome tired toes or make room for extra guests.



EVAN SUNG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**CHEERFUL** Steven Sclaroff inspects the Ottoman 647 by Josef Frank at Just Scandinavian in Manhattan; \$1,775, (212) 334-2556, justscandinavian.com.

**S**TEVEN SCLAROFF is a big fan of footstools, "both for their intended use and as extra pull-up seating," he said. "I have them all over my house, and if a lot of people are coming over, I just herd them all into the living room."

An interior and product designer who owns an antiques shop in TriBeCa, Mr. Sclaroff is known for his somewhat quirky aesthetic and his ability to meld disparate styles with a touch of humor.

And when it comes to footstools, he prefers unexpected combinations. "They don't have to match the chair, each other or the room," he said. "If they did all coordinate, it would be a bit hotel-ish."

His own collection, in fact, is so diverse that "it kind of looks like Gorey's 'Curious Sofa,' with all the different legs," he said. "It looks funny, and I like that."

Mr. Sclaroff found several footstools to add to that collection within walking distance of his office in TriBeCa.

At Just Scandinavian, he liked the Ottoman 647 by Josef Frank. "It's upholstered in an un-

usual pattern I haven't seen with a stool," he said, and "is kind of happy."

A few blocks away, at Karkula, he found a classic on display: the PK33 stool by Poul Kjaerholm. Mr. Sclaroff praised its "knife-edged cushion and single tuft at the center," noting that "it looks like a big water cracker."

A leather pig at Jonathan Adler also caught his eye. "It's clearly not going to match any of your furniture," he said. "Unless you are the exceptional owner of a suite of furniture shaped like livestock. But that's the point: it's a sculpture you put your feet on."

Online, he found a colorful Dutch Wax ottoman, which he deemed "genius" for its use of Visco-inspired fabric. "It takes an unremarkable but functionally perfect cube and soups it up with bold color and pattern," he said.

But Maurizio Galante's Cactus pouf for Cerruti Baleri ultimately took the prize for humor and irony. "It's pretty hilarious to make something to sit or put your feet on what appears to be the last place you'd want to do that," he said. "It's visually uncomfortable in a way that could provoke psychosomatic itching."

RIMA SUQI



Pig; \$795 at Jonathan Adler, (800) 963-0891, jonathanadler.com.



Moroccan pouf; \$295 at John Derian, (212) 677-3917, johnderian.com.



Mushroom ottoman by Pierre Paulin for Artifort; \$750 at Mark Frisman Ltd., (917) 568-8354, markfrisman.com.



Mole stool by Sergio Rodrigues; \$2,500 at Moss, (866) 888-6677, mossonline.com.



Alexandria stool by Baker Studio; \$1,316, (800) 592-2537, bakerstudio.com.



Tattoo Cactus pouf by Maurizio Galante for Cerruti Baleri; \$725 each at M2L, (800) 319-8222, m2lgenuinedesign.com.



Dutch Wax ottoman, Green checks; \$198 at Anthropologie, (800) 309-2500, anthropologie.com.