In Celebration of Recycled Paper, Turned Around Trash and Awe Inspiring Dwellings

By Diane Weisbeck, 4/11/2014

We were thrilled when we read the news that the prestigious Pritzker Prize was awarded to Shigeru Ban, a Tokyo born architect, with offices in Tokyo and Paris, for his elegant, creative and resourceful approach to both architecture and humanitarian endeavors.

For over twenty years Ban has dedicated himself to traveling around the globe to sites of natural and man-made disasters, to assist relief workers, citizens, volunteers and students. He designs and constructs innovative, graceful, low-budget shelters and community buildings fabricated using reclaimed materials, to aid thousands of needy disaster victims. Ban has designed and built emergency housing in Japan and cardboard homes in Haiti. His sturdy recycled paper tube structures, many constructed as temporary shelters, are so strong they have become permanent homes.

Shigeru Ban has created many paper tube structures, worldwide. Would you walk across his paper bridge in Remoulin, France? Ban’s Cardboard Cathedral, created after a massive earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand left the city’s oldest church in ruins, now stands as a glorious edifice in its own right. It’s a remarkable, inspiring and spiritual space and it’s made out of cardboard.

What wondrous buildings come to mind when you consider awe-inspiring and adventurous spaces? The gleaming marble domes of the Taj Mahal, with its soaring minarets and jeweled lapidary work of precious gemstones? Does amazing and awe-inspiring have to be produced using costly materials, or can the spiritual and life changing impressions that we get by experiencing these spaces be what is most precious of all?

# In the late 19th century, the Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí, became the first modern designer to repurpose waste from construction sites. His fanciful, overwhelmingly organic structures use trash as an important design element and create a powerful image that cannot be categorized.

In the swamps of Florida there stands a 12,000 square foot fort called Solomon’s Castle. It is completed fashioned out of recycled materials, including the moat.

In Serbia, a man built his entire home, 60 square meters, out of recycled plastic bottles and worked in the decorative elements by alternating the colors.

Children in Guatemala helped to build their own school using 6000 plastic bottles filled with plastic grocery bags, potato chip bags, trash and other waste.

A group of young people in Uganda organized their skills and formed an organization called, “Eco Art.” They recently created a playground in a slum; completely out of trash for underprivileged children. A year later it was discovered that the children who spend time in this playground show marked improvements in their school work.

The environments we live in help to shape our lives. Allowing children to create fanciful and amazing dwellings is an important part of their creative learning process.

It starts with the blanket on the sofa becoming a sheltering and exotic tent. With the freedom to explore the possibilities, trash can become the building blocks for a remarkable adventure. We invite you to experience exciting new journeys with your children, by opening up the possibilities of creating awe-inspiring spaces.