

12 Stocks to BUY for 2014

**Rahim Kanani**, Contributor

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Meet The Pioneers Of Sustainable Design

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In an in-depth interview with [Douglas Smith](#), President of [EDSA](#), a landscape architecture and urban design firm, we discussed their efforts for more than 50 years to create sustainable places to live, work, learn and play.

Rahim Kanani: Tell me a little bit about the founding of EDSA and the origins of your sustainable design philosophy.


Douglas Smith: Edward D. Stone Jr. (Ed) formed EDSA in 1960, a time when the profession of landscape architecture was on the eve of expansion from the domain of small residences, estates and parks to the design of resorts, new communities and cities. Ed's premise for building a design practice was that landscape architects were equipped to lead complex, large-scale planning assignments. It was this philosophy that put EDSA at the forefront of redefining the role of landscape architects as master planners of large-scale developments and as team leaders. Ed was truly one of the pioneers during this transformation of the profession.

Intrigued by the relationship between built form and the natural environment, Ed was passionate about an environmentally-based design philosophy that takes inspiration from each project's rich local heritage and the unique attributes of each site. A village centered form became the framework for housing, amenities and commerce in order to conserve resources and foster social diversity. This approach became a hallmark of EDSA resorts and communities.

Early on, EDSA engaged in planning at a macro scale because it offered an ability to influence land use and development patterns based on an ethic of responding to, and protecting the physical attributes of the land. In other words, more times than not, the land will tell you what to do. This approach involves recognition of natural systems and preservation of environmentally sensitive features. At times, it involves repairing or enhancing eco-systems that have been compromised.



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DS: Most people immediately think of stewardship in terms of natural resource protection, but it also means helping local economies, designing opportunities for social interaction, creating memorable experiences and generating stronger real estate values. To achieve this, we must strike the right balance between natural, cultural, functional and aesthetic considerations of a project. This requires us to address the interrelationships of land use, environment, historic preservation, site design, architecture, pedestrian connectivity and vehicular networks. When these elements are properly balanced, we know that we have created something that will likely persevere over time.

To stay on the leading edge of real estate industry, we must continue to work hard and educate ourselves on new technologies that involve recycling, energy efficiency and building material selection, as well as low impact design methodologies related to water use and resource protection.

RK: What are some examples of your most environmentally-conscious projects, and what challenges did you have to overcome to push the envelope just a little more?

DS: The industry is evolving in that environmental consciousness design, more and more, translates to measuring project performance in terms of positive enhancements and contributions. Below are a number of EDSA projects, both on-going and completed, that we consider high performance.

In the 1960's, the concept of designing healthy places was a relatively obscure notion, but EDSA applied these pioneering principles and over subsequent decades created award winning projects such as PepsiCo World Headquarters, winner of the American Society of Landscape Architects Landmark Award; the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts; the Grand Cypress Resort in Orlando; Haig Point, which is upheld as an example of sound planning by the South Carolina Coastal Council and PGA National, the first Development of Regional Impact (DRI) processed in the State of Florida.

Today, as an entire generation is in danger of losing touch with nature because of the amount of time people spend in their cars, in their offices, and watching TV; we find these design principles to be as important as ever.

RK: You talk about being a steward of the land and the built environment, but what does that mean exactly when it comes to the design aspect, or the building aspect?

DS: Most people immediately think of stewardship in terms of natural resource protection, but it also means helping local economies, designing opportunities for social interaction, creating memorable experiences and generating stronger real estate values. To achieve this, we must strike the right balance between natural, cultural, functional and aesthetic considerations of a project. This requires us to address the interrelationships of land use, environment, historic preservation, site design, architecture, pedestrian connectivity and vehicular networks. When these elements are properly balanced, we know that we have created something that will likely persevere over time.

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Castiglion del Bosco (Italy): Encompassing 4,500 acres of Tuscan countryside, the 800-year old Castiglion del Bosco estate is located within the Val d'Orcia region of Italy. Characterized by an iconic traditional working landscape of forests, farms and fields with dark green Cypress trees juxtaposed against the pale, rounded hills, this region has been added to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List. The client's vision for restoring Castiglion del Bosco to the working agricultural estate and social center it once was, drove the site program and established the overarching design intent of the project. The design solution was informed by the historical significance of the site and a commitment to respecting the sustainable traditions of the region with an objective to preserve, restore and highlight the existing cultural and natural landscape. Disturbance was minimized by restoring and reusing buildings for resort amenities and integrating the protected ruins of the estate castle into the resort center. The topography and landscape character of the site was retained by limiting cut and fill during construction, and preserving over 70% of the existing forest and 200 acres of agricultural land for production. Gardens of native plants provide an aesthetic transition between the resort amenities and surrounding agrarian landscape. The landscape design included locally-sourced hardscape materials, installed by local craftsmen using traditional construction techniques. The economic impacts of the project are exhibited in the creation of jobs and a healthy improvement to the local tourism economy. The social and cultural factors that have proved successful at Castiglion del Bosco are teaching local skills and trades thru a variety of educational workshops. Workshops focus on organic and sustainable farming, gardening practices, wrought iron classes, Italian language classes, and a culinary program that teaches local and Florentine cuisine.

Crosswaters Ecolodge (Nankun Mountain Reserve, Guangdong Province, China): The goal for Crosswaters Ecolodge was the development of the first eco-lodge destination in China and the creation of an experience that would draw a worldwide audience eager to learn about the surrounding ecosystems while giving back to the local community. A quadruple bottom line approach was employed: protect existing forest biodiversity, ensure local people benefit from development, bring much needed capital to the economy, and respect the spirit of the place through thoughtful, sensitive, sustainable design. Through in-depth environmental, social and metaphysical analysis and integration of indigenous and recycled materials, the entire project is a devotion to the highest standards of responsible design and implementation. Crosswaters successfully incorporates principles of energy efficiencies, indigenous material selection and creation of local economic opportunities. Surrounded by 30 sq. kms of Bamboo forest, the preserve serves as the main income generating activity for the 5,000 residents.

Valletta Waterfront (Valletta, Malta): The Valletta Waterfront assignment entailed the privatization and reconfiguration of a portion of the 500-year-old historic waterfront into a highly successful local and international destination. Knowing that the primary purpose for revitalization was to enhance tourism, the team collected pre and post development data to support the resulting economic benefit. Redevelopment included the restoration of the historic Forni and Pinto stores for retail and commercial uses, waterfront piazzas and public spaces, staging for cruise ships and tourist activities, as well as enhanced vehicular and pedestrian circulation. The design has also had a strong influence in reducing the heat island effect and improving pedestrian circulation. Today, the Grand Harbour in Valletta is one of the top ten cruise ports in the Western Mediterranean Region welcoming over 350 cruise ships a year. In addition, regeneration of the historic core and repurposing of the waterfront helped celebrate the history and culture of the area.

Indura Golf Resort (Tela, Honduras): The Indura Beach and Golf Resort is located along the Caribbean coast of Honduras, in Bahia de Tela, a site of immense natural beauty and rich cultural history. Planned with the utmost care to both guard and protect, it absorbs and articulates the heritage of the area while providing a catalyst for tourism growth for the whole country. Architectural styles, structural footprints, and design processes were all undertaken in such a way to cause as little disturbance to the native landscape while also accurately reflecting the local fabric. Indura replicates the thatched-hut style of the nearby Garifuna community along with the addition of stilts to its buildings allowing for zero disturbance in natural animal migration patterns as well as assisting with irrigation, drainage and air flow. Elevated roads permit wildlife passage without danger from vehicular traffic.

Guacalito de la Isla (Nicaragua): At Nicaragua's first five-star sustainable residential resort destination along a four-mile stretch on Nicaragua's Emerald Coast, one of the most important elements is not the pristine white sand beaches or even the dramatic cliffs and high elevations. It's the local people and talented artisans who have become part of the hotel's fabric. Owned by Pellas Development Group, the destination offers guests an authentic Nicaraguan experience by safeguarding its people and the traditions, customs and heritage of the region with nearly 65% of its employees living in surrounding communities. From a social sustainability perspective, the soul and spirit of the local culture has become embedded in the property. The vision, planning, and design of Guacalito de la Isla follows a spirit of dedication, leaving a light footprint on the land through various renewable energy methods, the reuse of gray water and rainwater, and other sustainable building and daily living practices. Life at Guacalito de la Isla also creates opportunities for learning and growth and inherently gives back to the surrounding Nicaragua communities.

RK: How would you describe the intersection between creativity, design, and problem-solving, and how do you foster that kind of ethos in your organization?

DS: We are a design firm, but I think what we do is as much about problem solving as it is about design. Problem solving requires creativity and creativity is what leads us to good solutions. For us, a collaborative exchange of ideas is the basis of problem solving; therefore team brainstorming is an essential part of our creative process. We strongly believe that the participation of every member of the consulting team will yield the best result. So, we encourage freedom of thinking and the contribution of all ideas. What is energizing about this collaborative approach is that good design ideas and planning solutions can come from any team member, client or colleague and from other consultants.


Inspiration is also an essential ingredient of creativity, so it is important that we provide an atmosphere that is conducive to the creative process. We think the physical office environment plays a significant role in this process, as we all spend so much our professional lives at work. So, we pay attention to the layout of studio spaces and achieving a productive blend of personal space and communal space. Just as with the spaces we create for our clients, color and materials are also carefully considered.

Finally, there is no better teacher than travel. One advantage of being a global practice is that our designers have opportunities to travel fairly early in their careers. We learn a great deal from exposure to a variety of cultures and physical environments. Every location offers a unique sense of place that represents a learning experience and a source of inspiration.

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RK: Do you find that more and more clients are asking for sustainably-conscious design, and have you ever turned away projects where sustainability was not a factor?

DS: As the green revolution continues to evolve, there is no doubt that more clients are ‘tuned in’ and looking for sustainably-conscious design. The fact is, government agencies in most places have also come a long way on this issue and now require low impact and high performance design and development techniques. This only helps to elevate everyone’s game.

We are always learning more about the dynamic balance between environmental, economic and social components that will generate longer-term

relationships between users and the place, be it a resort, campus, urban district or residential community. In many cases, we have opportunities to educate our clients so they can understand the value-added benefit of doing what's right for the long-term, well-being of our planet and people.

If a client has a project that we feel is heading off track, we will work to adapt certain elements, adjust design guidelines and improve processes that results in a better project design and implementation. Yes, there have been cases when philosophies don't align, but I'd say over our 50+ year history, we've been pretty successful at getting projects implemented in a way that improves quality of life and environments in which they reside.

RK: Finally, what are some of the leadership lessons you've learned as CEO of the organization when it comes to corporate social responsibility and what it means to be a corporate citizen?

DS: It is interesting to me that this topic has definitely gained more public attention with the indiscretions of the financial industry over that past several years. Again, this is a subject for which Ed Stone led by example early on and Joe Lalli continued during his tenure as President of EDSA. The simple philosophy is that you receive and in turn, you must give.

There is a strong history of participation and philanthropy that is woven into the DNA of EDSA and we continue the legacy of corporate participation in local community charities. Just recently, we were honored by our local United Way organization for more than 20 years of consistent leadership in planning, organizing and leading their annual "Day of Caring" event.

We also believe it is important to give of our time to sit on boards and committees for various non-profit enterprises that are important to the health of people in our own communities, as well as to participate at a national level within professional organizations such as the Urban Land Institute and the American Society of Landscape Architects to advocate for responsible real estate practices.

We encourage such participation across the firm and view it as an excellent form of personal and profession development. As an added benefit, this is a great way to foster new generations of leadership.