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History of the Green Apple Map

by Wendy E. Brawer

It was December 1991. I was sitting in a conference room crowded with a hundred ecology-minded organizational people, planning activities to complement the upcoming five weeks of intensive meetings at United Nations headquarters in preparation for the Rio Earth Summit. I wondered how the participants, who would be coming from all over the world, perhaps for their one and only visit to New York City, could be encouraged to personally experience the environmental progress being made throughout our city. I decided to create a map for them, as it was the most direct, universally understood, resource-efficient way to make our city's ecological sites, human resources and activities more accessible to not only to visitors but also to residents.

I named it the Green Apple Map, and very quickly, research and development was underway. I teamed up with a cartographically-inclined graphic designer, Hal Drellich, and garnered the support of the Municipal Art Society, who arranged for their printer, Gramercy Offset, to donate 10,000 copies. The Green Apple Map showcased the city's most interesting and refreshing ecological features, ranging from outstanding places of natural beauty to well-designed examples of sustainable urban technology, including buildings to tour; greenmarkets, green businesses and other economic developments; environmental centers and museums; solar sites, bike paths and accessible bridges; the waste infrastructure and lots more, even the toxic hot spots of the Big Apple.

That first edition of Modern World Design's Green Apple Map was distributed at the UN and other urban ecology events during the spring of 1992. It was well received and was exhibited in The Power of Maps at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum. The Green Apple Map's usefulness as a networking and reference guide led Modern World Design to produce a more colorful, friendlier, expanded second edition by the end of 1992 which was more widely distributed.

This map encourages people to explore and understand our city -- helping expand our community of environmental stewards who understand the interconnections between the natural and built environments. It can help build a network of links among people of different ages and backgrounds by highlighting places that are important to our common future. It promotes and fosters replication of successful projects. Moreover, it challenges the assumption that this intensely urban setting has little redeeming ecological value.

Because of this project, I've grown to appreciate maps as communication devices for many reasons. Despite their modest appearance, maps are powerful tools for describing places. The designer creates a view and through it, the user experiences that place anew. Maps are economical and compact -- they are portable as well as postable, so their vision spreads rapidly. The Green Apple Map empowers quietly, helping us balance our priorities about our mobility, our destinations, and most importantly, where and how we wish to live.

As a model, the Green Apple Map demonstrated this tool's potential to influence the lifestyle of city dwellers across the globe. In the near future, Modern World Design plans to create a system for developing community-designed urban Green Maps, as it can be a democratic, inclusive method of fostering sustainability, education and involvement at the local level.

*This article first appeared in **Places** magazine in August 1994.*

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You might also like to read my July 1997 article, [The Green Map System, a Work In Progress](#), which appeared at www.libertytree.org.



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