

Personal Discovery

Treehugger.com's **Graham Hill** is helping to bring green into the mainstream



IMAGINE YOU LIVE IN A CUBE in the countryside of Quebec, where Graham Hill was raised. Five sides of that box leak heated air in the winter, and one long pipe ferries its water and sewage. Now place that same cube in New York City, stacked among dozens of similar blocks. The dwelling now has one outward wall, drastically reducing the amount of air leaked into the atmosphere, and the pipe transports water and sewage for many more people. "I've always enjoyed cities, and cities are in fact very green," says Hill, 37, a self-described "serial entrepreneur" and founder of the blog Treehugger.com.

"Our basic mission is to push sustainability and green into the mainstream," continues Hill, who founded the blog in 2004. Since then, an average of 1.6 million visitors have stopped by each month to peruse the site's impressive archive of more than 19,000 posts written by experts from across the globe. It is one of the most recognized green sites, as measured by Google and the blog-ranking service Technorati, and its even leant expertise to *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. If that isn't mainstream enough, Discovery Communications purchased the site last summer, making it a crucial element of its Planet Green network, launching in June. As a part of the deal, Hill becomes a vice president of interactive for Planet Green.

For Hill, the sale of Treehugger is more about "selling up" than "selling out." In the 1990s, he founded (and sold) an Internet development firm that listed Microsoft among its clients.

The move paid off handsomely and allowed Hill to pursue ventures nearer to his heart. "I had this environmental background and knew the Internet had done well," says Hill. "So I could find my own business, and I just sort of recognized a problem."

The problem was that most people — himself included — didn't care about the environment as much as they should. "I looked at myself and thought about what was preventing me from living a green life," says Hill, who came up with three obstacles: aesthetics, convenience, and fear.

"I care about how I get my haircut, what kind of clothes I wear, and what my apartment looks like," says Hill. "I wish I didn't, but aesthetic stuff matters. There was really only one aesthetic in the green movement — the hippy, crunchy aesthetic." Today, however, eco-chic is all the rage, and Treehugger is a big part of the reason. Similarly, Treehugger's content library has become a resource for people who crave convenience, providing them with a convenient way to search for hard-to-find, ecologically responsible products, news, resources, and opinion for a modern green lifestyle.

Surmounting the third obstacle, fear, is more about crafting a message that will inspire the masses. "While I believe it's really important to send the message that there are major issues and we need to do something, I really felt that you need to make it inspirational," says Hill. "You need to inspire by hope."

— John Patrick Pullen