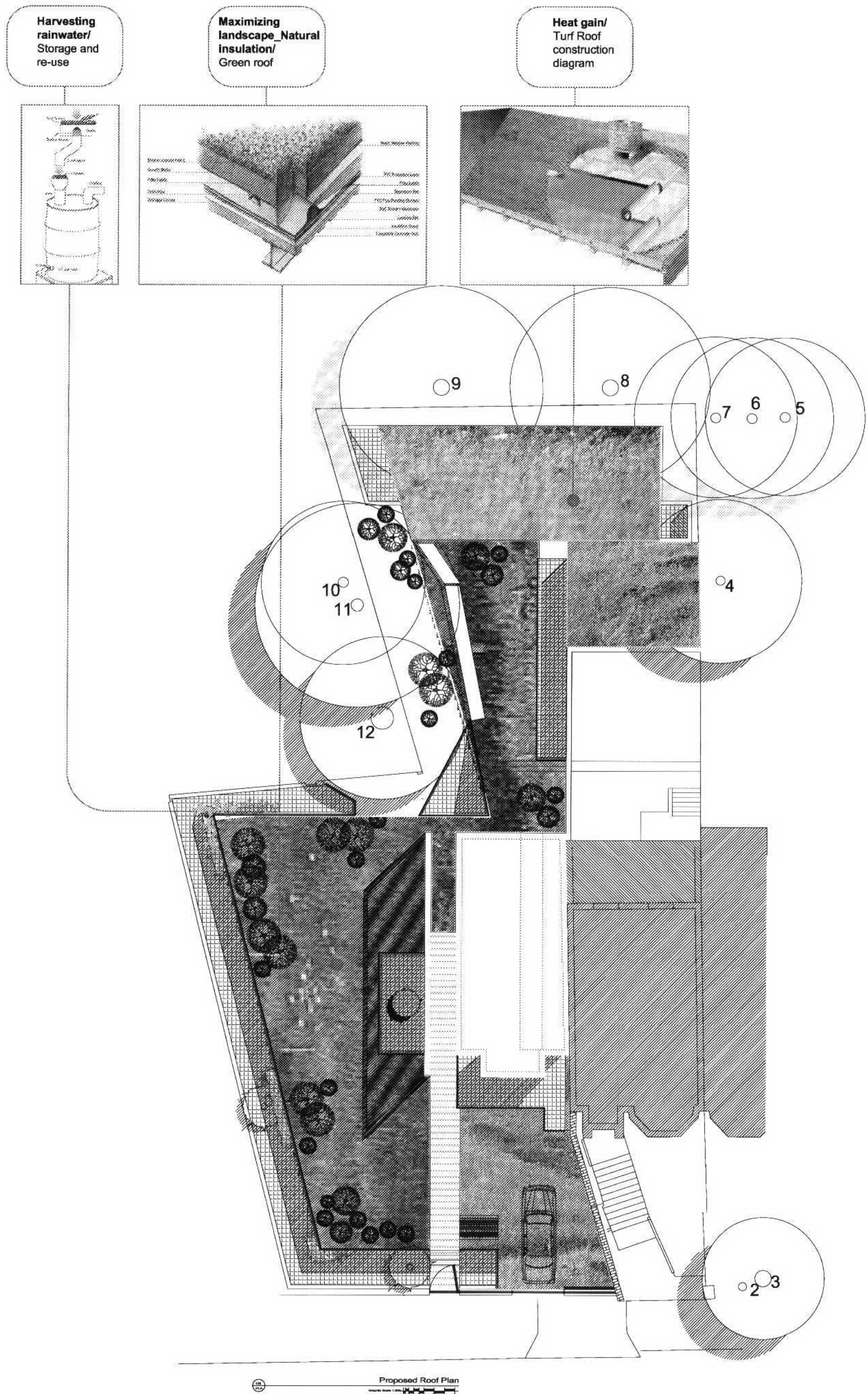




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The house in the hole

Down to earth home has pool and solar power

THIS is a three-bedroom detached house with a difference. The Clendon property has been built almost completely underground.

Architect Alex Michalos, who designed Suby House, has created the underground home two decades after he first spotted the plot of land and realised its potential.

Then — as an impact of the 1980s — he only dreamed of buying the site which is in a prime location just off Eastwood Grove in Notting Hill. Plotted on Mr Michalos' map, now one of the country's best known young architects, was his ambition to realise his dream.

But there was a drawback. Planners would only grant permission to build six feet above ground.

Undeterred, Michalos decided he could bypass the restrictions by digging down to create a two-storey house complete with swimming pool, heated roof, and a glass-roofed garden.

He paid £700,000 for the land by selling his flat and started the £300,000 cost of building work through private and bank loans.

Now, as the finishing touches are put to the underground house, he said: "It has been a nightmare, but I'm excited now it is finished. It was such a rare opportunity I grabbed for a while, but in the end I couldn't say no."

"The planning permission was the only reason we could afford to buy it — if you could build three storeys, that land would be worth £1.5 million to £2 million at the very least."

"It is quite beautiful and very, very green, set from above all you can see is grass on the roof."

Inside, the ground floor has a vast light-filled living area with wooden floors, steel surfaces and a massive built-in glass wall which opens up to a glass roof and a panoramic rear window which looks out onto the garden.

In the lower level are three bedrooms, a bathroom, and a utility room with washing machines powered by solar panels.

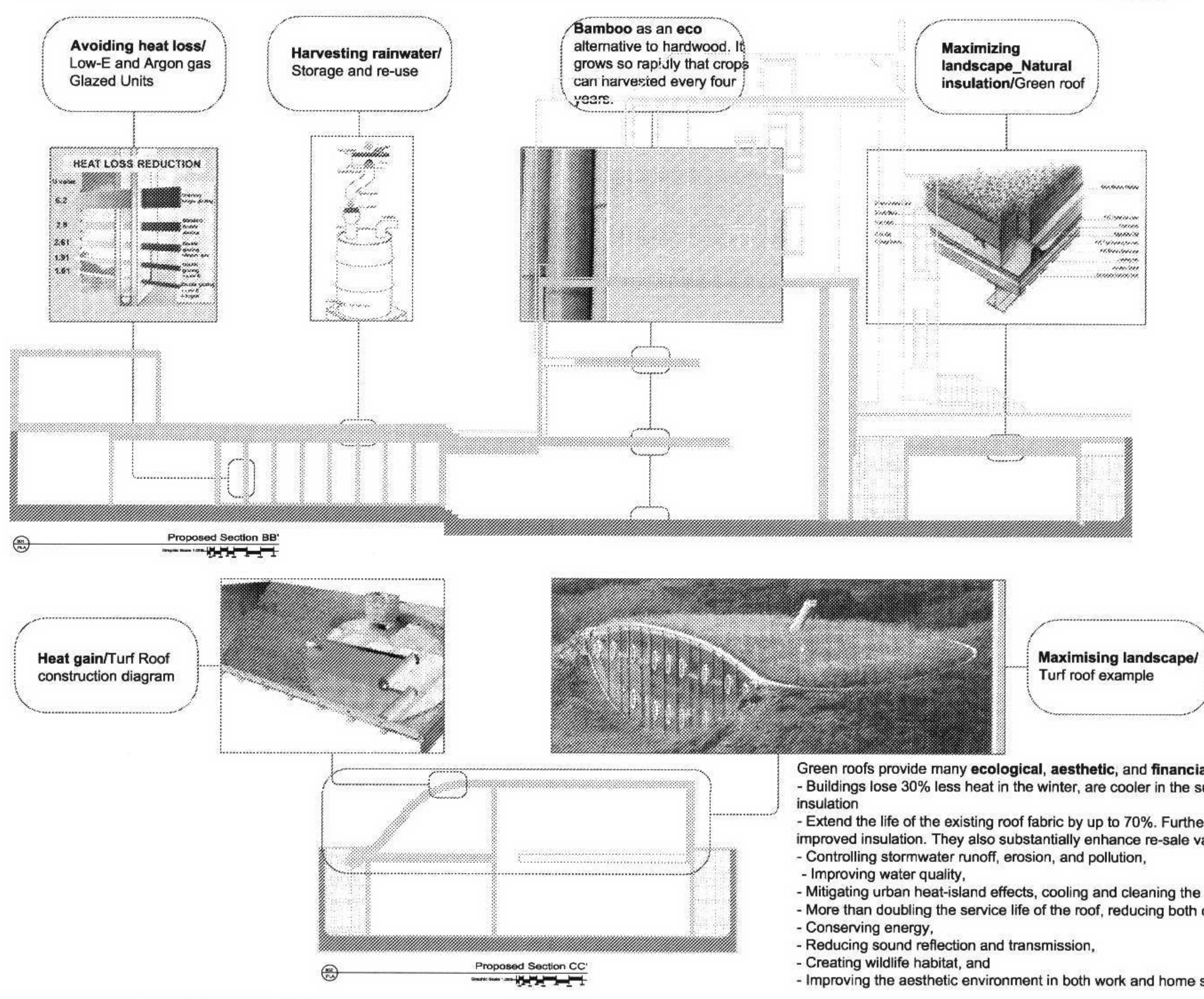
The swimming pool is filled from the house roof and the solar panels also power Mr Michalos's electric car and his bicycle. "The only utility we have is electricity but we can supply most of our own," he said.

Ground breaking the lowest roof, left, of the house in Notting Hill, which sits below street level. It was designed by Alex Michalos, below.

BY CHRIS MILLAR

Example of underground and eco house in a conservation area

Environmental friendly materials do not only involve the sustainability of natural resources, but also the energy consumed in their processing, transportation and their durability.



Green roofs provide many ecological, aesthetic, and financial benefits:

- Buildings lose 30% less heat in the winter, are cooler in the summer, and offer year-round sound insulation
- Extend the life of the existing roof fabric by up to 70%. Further savings are also made from improved insulation. They also substantially enhance re-sale values.
- Controlling stormwater runoff, erosion, and pollution,
- Improving water quality,
- Mitigating urban heat-island effects, cooling and cleaning the air,
- More than doubling the service life of the roof, reducing both costs and landfill,
- Conserving energy,
- Reducing sound reflection and transmission,
- Creating wildlife habitat, and
- Improving the aesthetic environment in both work and home settings.