



Is it worth it?

Natural pest control

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What is the environmental impact of conventional pest control?

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Eco hero Christoph Behling, Solar Shuttle designer

With the creation of his Solar Shuttle at the Serpentine in Hyde Park, the designer Christoph Behling has proved that it is possible to mess about in a motorboat without creating pollution, emissions or noise. Gliding across the Serpentine by Solar Shuttle, you can actually hear yourself talk, appreciate the beauty of the park and marvel at the boat – the way the curving solar panels charge the batteries that power the electric motors, to make one of the greenest forms of transport available.

'My idea was to design something so seductive that people would love it even if they didn't care about the environment or global warming,' Behling says. 'That's how the idea of the solar boat began and I've been doing it ever since. I wanted people to see it and say, yes, solar energy really does the job. That's what these boats do. We need to prove to consumers that the future is not necessarily going to be hell; that we won't all be living in recycled

'Once you've seen the Solar Shuttle it's difficult to argue for anything else'

clay houses. The future will work and will bring moments of joy.'

Behling was born in Geneva and studied design in Stuttgart. In the late 1990s he was introduced to the new generation of lightweight solar panels, as thin as a credit card, and began to think about ways to use this fast-developing technology. He moved to London and in 1997 set up Solarlab, designing and marketing new products and applications using solar technology. So far, the greatest success has been his boat designs – the company has already sold about 50. Some are small, sleek Sol 10 boats that take five people and cost £12,000. Others, like the Solar Shuttle,



which carries 40 passengers and two crew, are on a bigger scale.

Solarlab's largest boat can carry 120 passengers and is stationed at Hamburg's City Harbour. But Behling has spotted the potential for large solar boats on British waters as well, not least as cargo carriers on the reviving canal system, and at the 2012 Olympics.

'We'd like to have a proper ferry using a hybrid system of solar power and bio fuel, carrying around 150 people between Battersea and Canary Wharf for the Games,' he says. 'I am quite optimistic. Once you've seen the Solar Shuttle and the way it works then it's difficult to argue for anything else. You

can go green with so little effort.'

Solarlab is now busy looking at other applications for solar design, including rickshaws, golf carts and a solar-powered mosque in Dubai. 'As designers we should be aiming for better products,' Behling says. 'We need to get away from the word "alternative" with its suggestion of something slightly less good or less pleasant. If we aim for alternative we'll fail – we won't get out of bed for alternative. We get out of bed for better, nicer, happier.'

The Solar Shuttle runs at weekends in winter and all week in summer (020-8962 9425; solarlab.org)

Dominic Bradbury
Photograph by Reme Campos

Christoph Behling recommends...

Take a ride with the London cab company **Green Tomato** – young guys who bought a fleet of Toyota Priuses, and offset the carbon. It doesn't cost more than a normal cab and it's good for the environment (020-8568 0022; greentomatocars.com). I like the idea of the **Eglu chicken coop** by Omlet that you order with chickens included – it won't save the world but it might make us a little more aware of where food comes from (0845-450 2056; omlet.co.uk). Read **The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference** by Malcolm Gladwell (Abacus, £7.99). I think we're living in the time of a tipping point.

