

design for FREEDOM^{by} grace farms



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Design for Freedom Pilot Projects model more transparent and ethical supply chains in built works.

pilot project case study

Centerbrook Architects + Planners,
MillerKnoll, and
Turner Construction Company
New Canaan, CT
Opened February 2023



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New Canaan Library entrance featuring Connecticut-sourced stone facade

The New Canaan Library is the first Design for Freedom building project.

Pilot Project Program

Grace Farms developed the Design for Freedom Pilot Project Program to model more transparent and ethical supply chains. These projects engage project teams, yield new research and partnerships, and uncover challenges and opportunities of how to build more humanely.

The New Canaan Library Project

The New Canaan Library is a mission-driven knowledge and learning center that redefines the standards of a modern library. Its graceful design pays homage to the great tradition of mid-century modern architecture in New Canaan, while providing opportunities to meet, collaborate, and build community.

Conceived as a learning building, its flexible space facilitates both quiet contemplation and vibrant collaboration, as its design embodies our shared values of environmental and social sustainability.

New Canaan Library is the first building in the United States to become a Design for Freedom Pilot Project. As such, it is playing an important role in accelerating the Design for Freedom movement by raising awareness of forced labor in the building materials supply chain and activating the largest construction company in the U.S., Turner Construction.



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Featured building materials include glass, timber, steel, ceiling panels, and textiles

Building Program

- A 325-seat auditorium which can be reconfigured to accommodate multiple, community enriching programs at the same time.
- An expansive children’s room and garden brings increased programming, indoors and out, while cozy seating amid well-displayed books captivate our youngest visitors.
- The mezzanine houses the Community Living Room, a double-height gallery where readers can browse our print collections, then curl up next to a fireplace to read in comfortable seating.
- A collaborative work space and a professional business center including two mid-sized conference rooms and nine smaller meeting rooms help satisfy the great demand for collaborative workspace supporting residents and small business owners.

- The outdoor roof terrace offers expansive views of New Canaan and a place to relax.
- A cafe provides quick, convenient refueling for children and adults.

The Materials Examined

Subcontractors working on the Library construction project supported the Design for Freedom initiative by tracing 27 building materials back to its sources, including raw materials, in an effort to expose the potential of forced labor in these products. The traced materials were chosen by Turner Construction Company and the Design for Freedom team. Some of the materials include mineral wool insulation, countertops, metal roof panels, wood doors, tile, flooring, lighting, glass, steel, and CMU masonry.



The building meets both environmental and ethical sustainability goals

Pilot Project Process

The project team and the Design for Freedom team selected materials and traced the supply chain upstream as far as possible with the goal of trying to ensure, to the extent possible, that the material is forced labor-free.

The New Canaan Library was one of the earliest Pilot Projects for Design for Freedom. In fact, the process started in tandem with the development of the [Design for Freedom Toolkit](#). Centerbrook Architects + Planners (Centerbrook) had completed construction documents and Turner Construction Company was bidding the project when the commitment to Design for Freedom was made. With the majority of design decisions and material selections already confirmed, this early process served as a litmus test to understand the existing state of the building materials market. Ethical Design Specifications were incorporated into the documentation and contract of each subcontractor initiating the first building-scale pilot project for Design for Freedom.

With sustainability a primary design goal of the Library, the project team learned more about the labor practices of suppliers such as local Delgado Stone harvested in four quarries around Connecticut and assembled in Brookfield, Connecticut only 30 miles from the site. This process reinforced the value of working with local suppliers to mitigate the risk of forced labor in the built environment.

Approaching this project at the start of the construction process was a new undertaking, and the Turner team worked rigorously alongside Centerbrook to ask questions, learn more about each supplier, and familiarize themselves with ethically-responsible industry-specific certifications. Simultaneously, Grace Farms was working to create and to formalize the parameters of the tracing process and identify the building products at highest risk for forced labor.

The Design for Freedom Supplier Outreach Letter was sent out to subcontractors as they were entering into the bidding process which introduced the Design for Freedom Pilot Project Program. The project team selected 27 subcontractors from the original 300 contacted to initialize the tracing process for the Pilot Project Program.

Each material was tracked on an overall material tracking spreadsheet. The information included countries of origin for each tier of the supply chains, records of correspondence, and ethically-responsible certification documentation.

Representatives of New Canaan Library, Turner Construction Company, Centerbrook, and Grace Farms came together for regular meetings to report findings and share information revealed throughout the tracing process.



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Design for Freedom
Ethical Supply Chain
Workshop held at
Grace Farms on
November 12, 2023

Design for Freedom Ethical Supply Chain Workshop co-hosted by Turner Construction Company, Grace Farms Foundation, and the U.S. State Department Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations

Trailblazing Tools

The outreach tools developed throughout the New Canaan Library Pilot Project process including the supplier questionnaire, Ethical Design Specifications, supplier outreach letter, and tracking spreadsheet ultimately became a part of the *Design for Freedom Toolkit* which was published in March 2022. **The Toolkit was the first-of-its-kind to provide an actionable approach to eradicate forced and child labor from the building materials supply chain.**

Design for Freedom Ethical Supply Chain Workshop

The Ethical Supply Chain Workshop was held on November 14, 2023 at Grace Farms. Turner Construction Company's leadership in this monumental day was a direct outcome of the company-wide commitment that began with their work on the New Canaan Library as a Design for Freedom Pilot Project. Representing over 10,000 employees, Turner Construction has been a leader in accelerating the Design for Freedom movement and providing awareness across the industry, including creating an internal Working Group to focus on the integration of this work into their global practice.

One year prior in 2022, Turner hosted an ESG Sustainability Summit, where leaders exchanged ideas about sustainable and ethical supply chains and featured Design for Freedom.

The Design for Freedom Ethical Supply Chain Workshop workshop brought together government officials, the industry's largest manufacturers, and leading technology partners to propose strategies to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of global compliance policies for value chain due diligence.

The Workshop featured dynamic panel discussions centered on critical topics related to supply chain due diligence including: the legal framework and responsibilities of businesses and organizations to know their supply chains; the way building materials and the building materials supply chain intersect with the climate; how innovative technology can be activated to trace supply chains and mitigate risks; the ethical decarbonization market shift and financing a just transition. Key insights into this critical work are presented in a report available on designforfreedom.org.



Galvanizing Change

Pilot Project Outcomes

Lessons Learned

The New Canaan Library is a trailblazer – unearthing the challenges of the Design for Freedom Pilot Process and how to approach ethical material tracing within the building materials supply chain. Materials were tracked to extraction location and country by tiers within the supply chain, beginning with Tier 1 which is the closest tier to installation and reaching as far back as Tier 5. Five of the 27 isolated materials were traced to the United States for their original extraction location. Other countries of extraction included Canada, Germany, Italy, South Africa, New Zealand, Vietnam, and South Korea.

Through this investigative process, the project team was able to see the impact that global laws have made on the manufacturing practices in countries such as Canada, South Africa, and New Zealand. With the enactment of the Modern Slavery Act of Australia in 2018 and the United Kingdom in 2015, compliance laws have instigated change in the manufacturing process through corporate supply chain commitments publicly available online. These commitments are the first step in creating accountability and awareness within the industry.

Holistic Approach to Sustainability

Centerbrook Architects and Planners viewed the Design for Freedom Pilot Project as an opportunity to expand its commitment to a holistic approach to sustainability to include the ethical production of building materials. The Design for Freedom Pilot Project allowed the design team to develop rigorous processes to trace the provenance of 27 building materials including structural systems, insulation, doors, waterproofing and roofing, piping, flooring, mechanical systems, and finishes.



The provenance of 27 building materials were traced

Centerbrook is incorporating lessons learned into its product selection protocols, with the goal of incorporating low-carbon, non-toxic materials that are also ethically sourced. It updated its standard specifications to address the issue, and vets products using the Design for Freedom questionnaire. In addition, Centerbrook conducted a firmwide sustainable materials research effort that included equity in the supply chain as a criterion, learning through the effort that otherwise “green” products, such as solar panels, may contain components likely made with forced labor, while high-carbon-intensity materials, like domestic steel, may have a good labor record.

Centerbrook is poised to build industry partnerships that create awareness about how forced labor is used, and to better educate its clients so they can understand the implications of using products with undocumented sources. In addition, the firm is sharing what it learned with industry colleagues through workshops sponsored by AIA Connecticut and the National Organization of Minority Architects.



Market Transformation

Design for Freedom’s continued collaboration with leading furniture and textile manufacturer MillerKnoll has been a galvanizing force within the movement. Herman Miller and Grace Farms began a partnership in 2021 when Herman Miller was the exclusive retailer of Grace Farms’ Design for Freedom Face Mask. The mask’s design was long-listed for the wearable design category of the Dezeen Awards.

Sustainability has been a part of the ethos of Herman Miller since 1953, and since 2007, Herman Miller has maintained Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Chain of Custody certification for many of their wood, laminate and veneer work surfaces and tables, receiving the FSC Leadership Award for longstanding commitment to manufacturing with wood from responsible sources. The company prioritizes ethical and sustainable sourcing utilizing certifications such as Cradle-to-Cradle, of which they were the first to have a certified office product in 2004, and ILFI Declare labels to create transparency for buyers.

With Every Fiber Exhibit

MillerKnoll continued their commitment to Design for Freedom by providing the fabric for a permanent installation at Grace Farms demonstrating ethical design principles in action. *With Every Fiber* challenges the industry and public-at-large to consider where the materials that go into buildings come from and reimagines the future of the built environment. The exhibit gallery walls are covered with fabric drawing attention to the room’s perimeter and reminding visitors of the physicality of the spaces that they inhabit.

Taking Action

The goal of the Pilot Project is to raise awareness, initiate and add industry material transparency knowledge and data, and to assist in the eradication of forced labor in the built environment. Moving forward, as project teams continue to apply the Design for Freedom Principles to their own workflow, the following takeaways should be considered:



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The Design for Freedom Toolkit provides means and methods for incorporating material transparency in the design and construction process

1. ***The Design for Freedom Toolkit***: This tool provides research on 12 high-risk building materials. It is recommended to read and consult the *Toolkit* throughout the material selection process to understand the specific risk for each material and certifications available by industry.
2. **Quality over Quantity**: Instead of attempting every material, create a targeted list of 5-10 products that will be traced throughout the project. A succinct list can build awareness and create manageable expectations for the project.
3. **Streamline with Tools**: Developing partnerships to explore ways to digitize the *Design for Freedom Toolkit* Questionnaire to collect supplier data and ultimately create a common material framework of useful product data for future applications.



Making The Commitment

New Canaan Library

“When I talk to people about the building, I sometimes refer to New Canaan Library’s institutional commitment to the ‘triple bottom line’– environmental sustainability, social equity, financial feasibility. Everything that happens in this building, whether it’s outward facing or inward facing, we try to view through that lens. That doesn’t mean that we can always hit all three goals, but we do our best to at least try - raising awareness is a critical first step.

Design for Freedom was an easy ‘yes;’ once we knew about the pervasiveness of forced labor in design and construction, how could we not agree to become a Pilot Project? Libraries are all about facilitating lifelong learning. Inside our walls, people explore and grow; what if the walls themselves were a learning opportunity?

The relationship with Design for Freedom partner, MillerKnoll, is a key example. Our furniture comes from MillerKnoll, whose values align with ours, and its striking beauty and comfort immediately signal to visitors that we’re doing things a little differently here. Sustainability signage throughout our building highlights facts about furniture and materials that were specified because of their contribution to climate action and human rights. A business program held with MillerKnoll executives spoke about how businesses do well by focusing on people, planet, and profit. We will continue to program around our values in ways that foster positive learning outcomes for the community.”

- Micaela Porta, ESG Coordinator,
New Canaan Library



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The Community Living Room welcomes visitors with mission-aligned MillerKnoll furniture

Turner Construction Company

“In June 2023, Turner debuted a broadened organizational sustainability strategy that aligns with the criteria of ESG. It is anchored by 57 commitments and is structured by seventeen themes of which one is ‘building a more sustainable supply chain.’ This theme was very much influenced by our experience with our New Canaan Library project and a pilot supporting Grace Farm’s and their Designing for Freedom toolkit. Our next steps will be to grow this same awareness amongst our 11,000 employees over the next couple of years. We will then take that same knowledge and extend it to the 110,000 workers that actively contribute to our projects every single day.”

- Pete Hamill, Senior Vice President, Turner
Construction at Design for Freedom Summit 2023



MillerKnoll

Debbie Propst, President of Global Retail at MillerKnoll addressed the business advantages of reducing risk through ethical supply chains and her work on the New Canaan Library:

“One of the amazing things about being part of a global company like MillerKnoll is that we can actually take the most stringent requirements and apply them across all of our businesses. We are learning from the regions that are the most prolific in supporting anti-slavery requirements.

It does take bravery to audit – to the extent that more audit requirements could be in place, that is going to help customers understand their supply chain, and be more transparent about it. Commitment to that audit process from a social perspective is very critical...

The job of everyone in this room is to make sure everyone that is making decisions in the supply chain becomes more and more conscious, and that we spread this consciousness with the customer base.”

– Design for Freedom Summit, 2023

“What is most important about this work that we do collectively is creating awareness. To give Grace Farms Foundation and Design for Freedom, a platform that has a strong voice in this space already just amplifies our mission at MillerKnoll and creates a huge opportunity to engage a wise audience for Design for Freedom.”

– Design for Freedom, 2022

New Canaan Library

“We’re not going to be able to say this is the first slave-free building, because we won’t be able to know that. The hope is that the work we’re doing on this project means that in time, whether it’s the next project or the fifth project, there will be the means that slavery in the built environment can be eradicated.”

– Lisa Oldham, Executive Director



Installation of natural stone facade

Centerbrook

“Combatting modern slavery in the built environment is a call to action. If we leverage the construction industry’s buying power, we can raise awareness about how forced labor is used to make the materials in our buildings, and then we can find ways to stop it.

We influence suppliers and manufacturers by integrating forced labor requirements into every project we design. It takes perseverance, but if we keep beating the drum, the supply chain will change.”

– Jim Childress, FAIA, Principal



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New Canaan Library is the first building in the United States to be a Design for Freedom Pilot Project

Project Data

Pilot Project Team

Centerbrook Architects + Planners, Turner Construction Company, MillerKnoll, Stimson Landscape Architects, Kohler Ronan Consulting Engineers, and Karp Associates

Project Size 42,000 GSF

Materials Examined mineral wool insulation, countertops, metal roof panels, wood doors, tile, flooring, lighting, glass, steel, stone, and CMU masonry

27 suppliers/manufacturers in the product supply chain

Materials Sources from (countries) United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, Germany, Italy, Vietnam and South Korea

Product and Corporate Commitments Environmental Product Declarations, Responsible Minerals Initiative, Responsible Labor Initiative, Declare

Supplier Documentation in alignment with Design for Freedom Principles

GRI, EcoVadis, SASB, TCFD, WRI, ESG Annual Reporting, Conflict Materials Report



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Grace Farms brings together people across sectors at the SANAA-designed River building and Barns, situated on 80 acres of publicly accessible, preserved natural landscapes

Design for Freedom Pilot Projects

Design for Freedom by Grace Farms reimagines architecture by raising awareness and inspiring responses to disrupt forced labor in the building materials supply chain. Grace Farms developed the Design for Freedom Pilot Project Program to model more transparent and ethical supply chains. These projects engage project teams, yield new research and partnerships, and uncover challenges and opportunities of how to build more humanely. This process challenges each team to examine their supply chain for fair labor and galvanize change to create new outcomes for the industry.

Learn More about Design for Freedom

Read the [Design for Freedom Report](#) to understand the scope of the problem and challenges facing the eradication of forced and child labor from the built environment. For material specific information, explore the [Design for Freedom Toolkit](#) to learn more about the 12 high-risk materials within the built environment and utilize tools to start tracing materials.

About Grace Farms Foundation

Grace Farms is a center for collaboration and culture in New Canaan, Connecticut. Grace Farms bring together people across sectors to explore nature, arts, justice, community, and faith at the SANAA-designed River building and Barns, on 80 acres of publicly accessible natural landscapes. Grace Farms' humanitarian work to end modern slavery and foster more grace and peace in local and global communities includes leading the Design for Freedom movement to eliminate forced labor in the building materials supply chain.

For more information visit gracefarms.org