

How to choose a Y2K-compliant property

Many mainstream media outlets have recently suggested that rural land sales will increase significantly in 1999 due to the Y2K problem. For those who have not yet heard, many date-related computer programs and imbedded microchips created before 1997 were given only two digits to represent the year. For example, 1984 was written as "84."

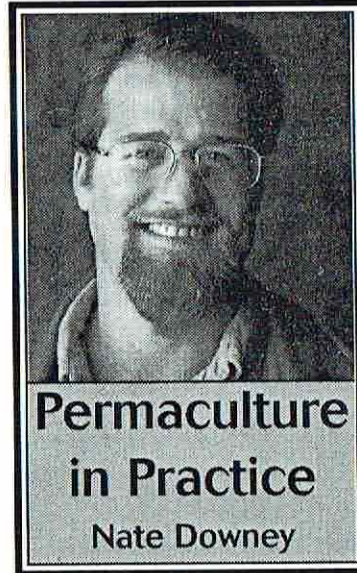
Experts predict that many programs and chips that have not been fixed before the deadline will respond ineffectively the moment the year 2000 arrives.

With its long history of passive solar building, alternative energy and acequia farming, northern New Mexico would be a relatively safe place, at least as compared to our nation's cities, in the event of a worst-case scenario involving power grids, food distribution systems and/or telecommunications failures. Both *Time* magazine and *The New York Times* have run articles about the potential for such scenarios, as well as feature arti-

cles about those who believe some religious or alien-related Armageddon is due soon. Personally, I think the chances of widespread chaos are extremely low, but I also believe that anyone buying or selling land in northern New Mexico this year would be wise to consider what a "Y2K-friendly" property might look like.

Among many other things, permaculture, as a system for designing sustainable communities, provides insights for people with concerns about staying warm and putting food on the table should regional power falter for a significant period of time. By living in a well-insulated, passive-solar home with a small greenhouse, plenty of storage, and a water well powered by photovoltaic panels, modern life off the power grid can be both easy and sustainable.

Realtors should not be surprised to hear clients ask for homes with pantries, basements, large garages or any place where food, water, candles and



other such items could be stored. Any property with a functioning windmill, wood stove or other alternative energy system could be advertised more vigorously.

Barns and even chicken coops should be appraised highly lest they get gobbled up below market value.

More so than during the recent drought, we should expect to hear questions concerning cisterns, gray water, water purification

systems, constructed wetlands and perhaps even the physics behind composting toilets. Some clients may even consider the health of the soil, its slope and general protection from our high mountain winds – whether they be the cold north winds that prevail in winter or the dry, dusty winds that blow mercilessly during the spring planting season.

Even though fireplaces release more heat than they provide, they can usually warm a room, so greater value should be given to fireplaces, especially if they are directly connected to a heat-releasing mass such as a banco, and even more so if they are located in a small room near the kitchen.

Remote locations may or may not be important to buyers. For the people I talked to from New York City over the holidays, who plan on paying a scouting visit soon, living a stone's throw from Frenchy's Field is probably as rural as they'd feel comfortable. For others, only those 30-acre tracts near the Colorado

border would do. Either way, the Y2K problem has already been dubbed "the first scheduled disaster in human history" by *The Washington Post*. No matter what we think may happen, when the sun comes up over Cerrillos Road less than 11 months from now, someone out there probably is predicting something far worse, and he or she has already made plans to move here based on this high level of anxiety. It could prove to be unwise for the real-estate community not to understand and address such fears.

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