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How to select a building site

As the local real-estate-selling season flares up, buyers should understand the importance of "site selection" before making offers. Careful consideration of the location of existing and potential structures at the very least can save time and money. In extreme cases, such consideration can prevent what permaculturalists call a Type One Error, a design flaw that proves fatal and irrevocable.

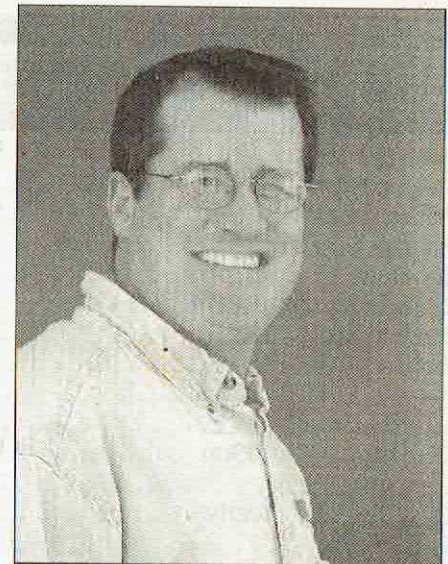
Picture a house built in the inevitable path of forest fire. If firescaping (shrub pruning, tree thinning, etc.) can prevent irrevocable damage to poorly sited structures, then a Type One Error is averted. However, if topography, prevailing winds, property lines, financial constraints, aesthetic concerns or any combination thereof make the effects of firescaping only nominal, then the significance of building such a dream home is clarified when a nightmare-style crown fire fries everything.

Other forces generating Type One Errors in northern New Mexico include flood, soil erosion, high winds, city councils, county commissions and state legislatures. Confused about government causing a Type One Error? Consider Bush's war. No amount of spin will ever eliminate the fact that this president has stoked anti-American passions throughout the world like nobody in history ever has, faster than anyone could have imagined, and in such obvious contradiction with the ideals for which he claims to stand. The effects, clearly, are irrevocable.

When buying property, the characteristics of an ideal building site should be understood. Hilltops are fire-prone, windy, difficult to access, and must withstand extreme heat and cold. Valleys are flood-prone, often very cold at night and can lack privacy. Relatively flat plains can make decent building sites, but they often receive overexposure from the elements.

This leaves us with the middle part of any slope, what we call the "thermal belt," as a likely candidate for the best site on which to build a structure. Typically, the thermal belt is much safer in terms of natural catastrophes and is less likely to present immediate conditions for Type One Errors. As its name suggests, the thermal belt maintains a more comfortable temperature than any of the other options. In addition, if the slope of the land is not too gradual, then the thermal belt is often well protected from the elements, and if the slope is not too steep, the building site should be relatively inexpensive to access and build upon.

Other factors to consider when selecting a building site are quantities of noise, traffic, shade, wind protection, qualities of views (both good and bad), access to open space, parks, services and utilities including water, and compatibility with existing neighbors, laws, building



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codes, and community covenants. Finally, remember to apply these general concepts to your specific situation in order to be a better prepared purchaser of real property.

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