

Smith cuts emerald in Parade crown

It would be a miracle in this small space to describe all of the eco-features associated with Solarsmith's project at the end of Nine Mile Road. Given its hefty photovoltaic array and carport-wall of solar water-heating panels, its nearly 7,000 square feet of shaded and/or passively cooled space, and its many super-insulated skylights (which eliminate the need for electric lights on sunny days), obviously the home deserved its Excellence in Green Building Grand Award in the Parade of Homes.

But that's just the beginning. The home's new owners will soon be able to boast receipt of regular payments from PNM for the company's use of the juice that the owners' panels produces. Under a new law, utilities are mandated to use some renewable energy, and such companies have realized that a convenient way to comply is to buy power from people like Solarsmith's clients.

"Ironically," owner/designer/builder/Realtor Mitchell Smith told me on the

last day of the tour, "the highest priority here was to maintain the property's spectacular views." Looking west over the Jemez, he beamed. "Unlike traditional solar architecture where orientation is paramount, solar radiant-heating systems allow for a more flexible floor plan."

I first met Smith 15 years ago when we both were setting up shop, so I wasn't surprised when the same guy who gave me the scoop on the Valle Vidal started exuding his love of the forest. Pointing to vigas harvested from standing dead spruce, beams salvaged after a fire, and walls that use mostly small-growth lumber, he even said beetle-killed piñon from the site was saved for erosion control and soil building projects. "Cabinets and windows? All SFI-certified," he grinned with tempered ecstasy.

With the help of Michael Nelsen of Ecoscapes, roofwater runoff is diverted to either of two landscape-oriented systems: a 15,000 gallon cistern to the south or a set of pumice wicks to the north. In

addition, all of the home's wastewater is treated with an aerated bag of bugs known as a "Sludgehammer." The system then conveys irrigation-quality water to the root zones of an orchard and berry patch.

There's even a fenced veggie garden perfectly planned between the carport and the kitchen door. Smith also won the tour's Best Exterior Character award in the super-pricey category, and, perhaps awkwardly, this helps promote sustainability more than Sudgehammers and solar panels ever will.

Smith's jewel was immediately enchanting from the road. Rising slowly from behind a wide, hydromulched knoll, the structure's smooth, rotund forms seemed to smolder in a polyvalent glow ranging from raspberry to chocolate. Under the noonday sun, its thick walls and Puebloesque rooflines almost hummed in harmony. At least to this thirsty cyclist, the structures appeared to emanate auspiciousness.

So enchanted I became, in fact, that I



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even thought to ignore, for this column, the property's front yard *faux pas* (namely, the water-hungry fish pond, lawn patches, and aspen trees). At least now the neighbors know the new folks down the block are human, too.

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