

Permaculture in Practice

Save thousands with site selection

As a landscape designer-contractor for 20 years, my sense of the current market is that more and more land purchases are being made by people who wish to increase the productivity of their chosen plot of high-altitude paradise. Many of my clients want a flat, sunny yard to grow food. Others need a shady, kitchen-accessible place for a compost pile. The most adventuresome envision a partially buried gravity-fed cistern system, a slope-side mini-orchard thriving off of greywater, or an aesthetically pleasing chicken coop - complete with solar greenhouse.

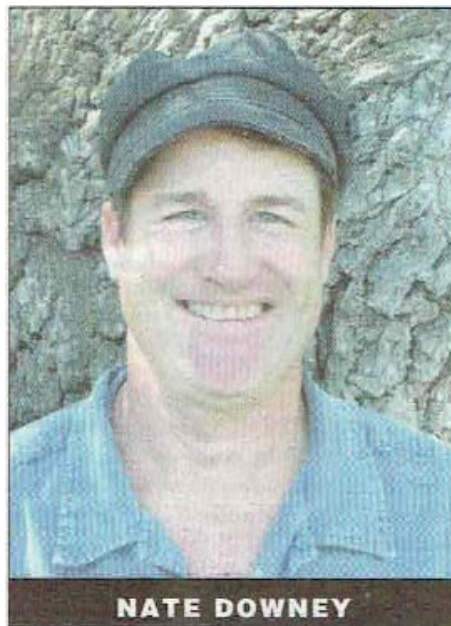
At the very least, people yearn for a convenient, comfortable, and magical spot that's protected from our spring winds and our incessant sun. They might not mind the occasional smoke from a wildfire, but thanks to last year's infernos in the Jemez Mountains, fire risk will be a hotter topic than usual this season.

Given this market, professional real-estate agents might want to learn how to satisfy this new ilk of client, and people of this breed need a method for choosing among the many potentially productive properties listed. Not everyone has time to take a two-week permaculture course. Few have patience for seminal texts like Bill Mollison's *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*, or Ian McHarg's *Design with Nature*. If you fall into this category, I'd suggest focusing primarily on a concept called "site selection."

As examples of poor site-selection, in previous columns I've picked on Eldorado for its ridiculous winds, and I've warned against living in steep, forested, southwest-facing developments due to their relatively high chances of wildfire. Today, I have a story about a pernicious weed.

Recently, I was criticized as being not so good at permaculture because I did not have a solution to an endemic bindweed infestation. Actually, I had six, but as it turned out none were acceptable. Granted, covering up the soil to prevent sunlight could take five years. Removing and replacing the soil would have cost thousands of dollars. Planting the entire property in raised beds would also be pricey, and the idea of constant and voracious weeding was, I admit, awful.

Four down. Two to go.



For a while my favorite solution was to keep pigs on the property to root out the bindweed. But, first, a farmer told me pigs might not thoroughly root out bindweed. Next, I read bindweed might be poisonous to pigs. When I worried that a pregnant hog would escape and a plague of wild boars would be traced back to my client, I chickened out. In the end, I encouraged her to move to a property (that is, to select another site) with better chances to grow the kickass garden she wanted. Not surprisingly, this idea was received with scorn.

Buyers and agents beware: thousands of dollars and headaches can be saved (and many more potential clients will become satisfied customers) if we recognize the importance of site selection. If you have any questions, please contact me, or come to my talk at The Firebird (1808 Espinacitas) on Saturday, April 14, from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. I'd be happy to discuss your site.

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