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Permaculture in Practice: Focus on water for a secure future

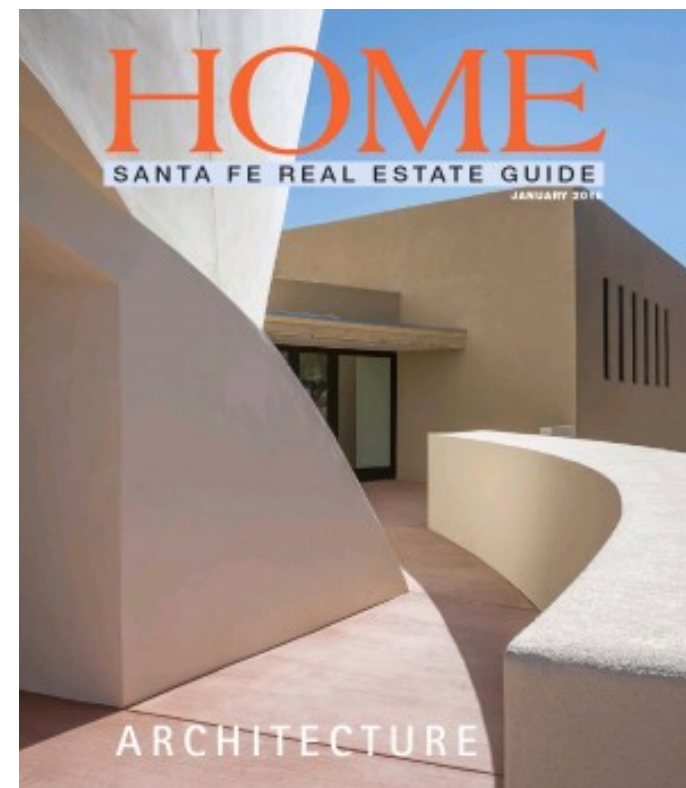
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Posted: Saturday, November 29, 2014 7:00 am

By **Nate Downey**
For **The New Mexican**

“Anyone who can solve the problems of water will be worthy of two Nobel Prizes,” President John F. Kennedy opined more than half a century ago, “one for peace and one for science.” Given that problems create economic opportunity, JFK might have suggested a prize trifecta — for peace, science and economics. Unfortunately, the Nobel in Economics Sciences had not yet been established.

The problem with the water-harvesting industry is that the price of a cistern is often compared to the price of tap water from community water systems. Community systems are often used to explain the economic term natural monopoly. Natural monopolies sell products and services without competition because competition would increase production costs. It's cheaper to share one system of underground pipes than it would be to pay for multiple pipe-matrices under every street or to drill and maintain multiple individual wells under every property in a development. Although natural monopolies are usually highly



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subsidized, their monopolistic tendencies make economic sense when water sources are 100 percent reliable.

Fortunately, opportunity is grounded in another economic term, diversity. Diversity is an important part of building a healthy investment portfolio. Eggs, like investments, are often best put in a variety of baskets, but rarely do we consider the importance of diversity when it comes to water — a resource more basic than eggs or money.

For this reason, wherever water systems are less than 100 percent reliable, opportunity for water-resilient real estate development exists. These days, many conventional water supplies — from municipal systems to private wells — are not meeting demand, and this trend is only increasing. As resources become less dependable, ratepayers face water-use restrictions and mounting fees, while well owners face the costs of drilling ever deeper for water that may not be there.

Rain harvesting, on-site wastewater recycling and passive water harvesting all represent ways to diversify when it comes to water-needy properties. Here's how water-wise investments in your land can pay off later:

- u Wherever water resources are perceived as limited, any real property with a working water-harvesting system is likely to increase in value by potentially providing vital resources when other supplies are either restricted or unavailable.
- u Cost savings can also be realized whenever community lines are distant and well drilling is difficult.
- u Regionally, land prices tend to increase due to the higher quality of life generated by tree-lined streets, healthy gardens and parks, and thriving community watersheds.
- u Rain capture has the potential to significantly reduce sediment levels in stormwater. This reduces reservoir dredging, water treatment and other costs

associated with community water systems.

u Less sediment also means less soil erosion. This elevates agricultural productivity, improves wildlife habitat and reduces upkeep expenditures for infrastructure.

Even though some water-systems managers would be content to wait for silver-bullet solutions to come from Nobel laureates, water-challenged property owners from California to Texas would be wise to take responsibility for their water portfolios and make them stronger and more diverse with water harvesting.

Nate Downey, the author of Harvest the Rain, has been a local landscape consultant, designer and contractor since 1992. He can be reached at 690-7939 or via www.permadesign.com.

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