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Make America smart again

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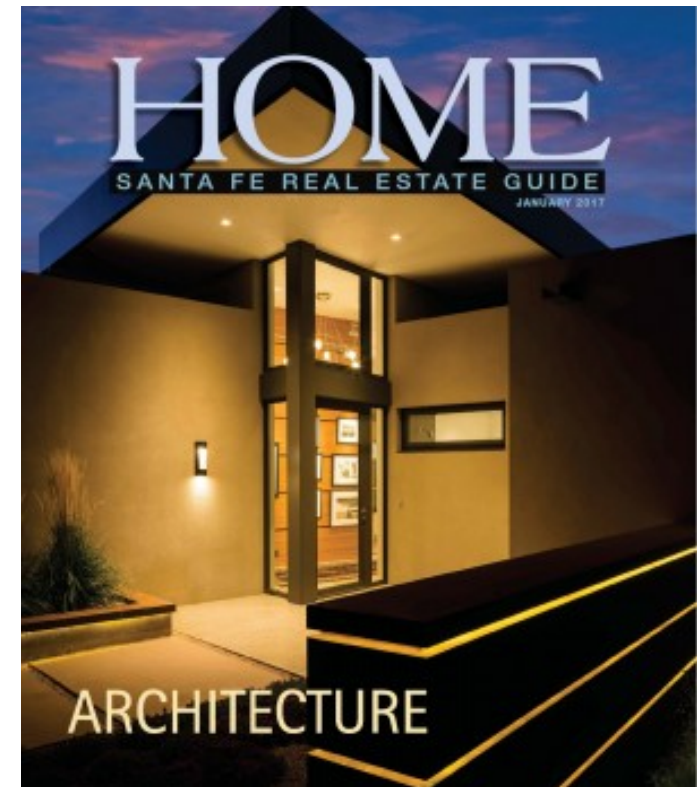
Posted: Sunday, January 1, 2017 5:00 am

Nate Downey/For The New Mexican

Friends are still freaking out about the looming Trump years, but it's time to stop lamenting. The season for shutting the trap of that pissed-off voice in your head is now. Instead, replace it with permaculture's fortuitous phrase, "The problem is the solution."

Say it like a mantra. Practice it everywhere, and remember: America has been made great by its commitment to serious problem-solving.

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Yes, the next administration is poised to boil over with science-deniers who don't give a plastic cup about the communities they plan to pollute. As this hedonistic brand of bigoted capitalism takes over, we'll be protesting 24/7, but let's also keep in mind that the situation will, ultimately, be good for green jobs.

Here's my logic. Given leaders who refuse to care about our planet's ecological challenges, our problems will become worse. This makes creative, helpful, and economically sound solutions even more valuable. When I first learned about permaculture, producing local food and energy was a smart idea, but it didn't seem necessary to most people. If you were fortunate enough to possess some wisdom and own property back in the early '90s, you might have harvested roofwater, reused greywater, and grown a garden — complete with an orchard full of chickens, bunnies, and bees — but few folks needed to. Today, with such blatant disregard for Mother Earth at America's helm, it's not a question of if we might someday have to hassle with a sustainable-systems approach to civilization. It's a question of how to do it ASAP.

The solution, of course, lies in the design of sustainable communities. In the developed world, the problem of localized soil erosion is exacerbated by impervious surfaces like roofs and roads. Whenever it rains or snows, we mostly ignore the food and energy that this water source could create and/or conserve. But water harvesting is just the beginning. In order to support existing human populations, we will need to develop a smarter attitude toward conserving and repurposing energy.

One of the best examples of such intelligent technology is aquaponics. These systems grow fish, fruits, and vegetables in small spaces with very little water. Recirculating from fish tank to plant roots and back to fish tank, water and nutrients are delivered to plants via diluted fish poop, while fish-water filtration is achieved by hungry plant roots. In this manner, fish and edible plants grow up to be healthy, happy, and delicious.



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Fortunately, the Santa Fe Community College's Trades and Advanced Technology Center has been focusing on these systems for years. "The center is awesome because it's a reflection of our community," SFCC's renewable-energy programs coordinator Xubi Wilson said recently. "What drives it is all the interaction among disciplines. Walking down the hallway, an aquaponics student might be vexed by the costs of winter heating, so it's great that she can run into people she knows in the biofuels lab or photovoltaics department and suddenly have a solution to her problem."

See? There it is again. Say it out loud. Sing it in a choir. Scream it from a rooftop. The problem is the solution.

Nate Downey started Santa Fe Permaculture in 1992, authored Roof-Reliant Landscaping (2008) and Harvest the Rain (2010), and is the president of PermaDesign, Inc. He can be reached via www.permadesign.com or 505-690-7939.



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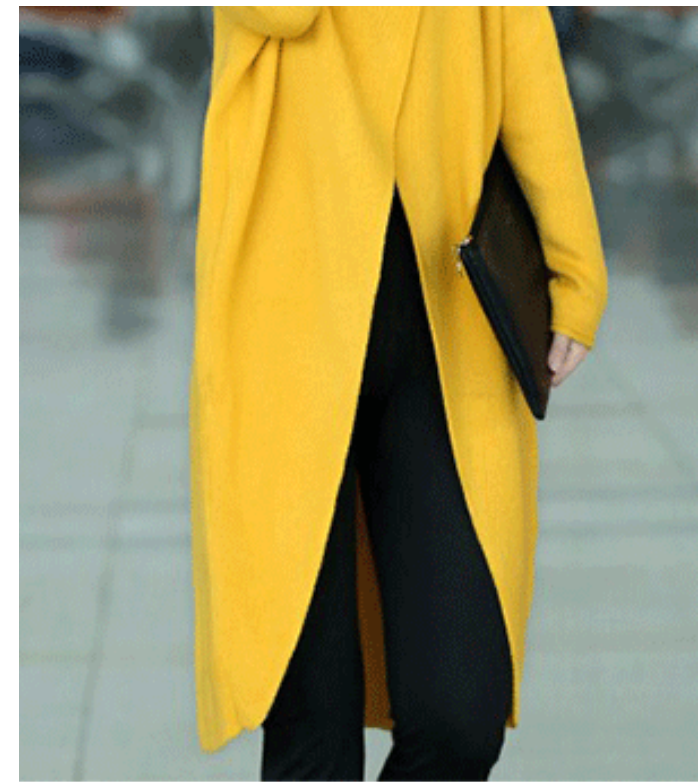
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