

# If You Build It

## Santa Feans have no excuse for not building green.

The Santa Fe Reporter, by Wren Abbott, April 22, 2011



It may seem unlikely in the City Different, but green building educator Robin Dorrell is still running into the mistaken perception that sustainable building designs are “eccentric.”

If “green building” still conjures images of radical Taos “earthships” and teched-out geodesic domes, that’s one myth Dorrell hopes to dispel. ADC Network’s portfolio of former students’ projects is filled with modern-looking homes that don’t wear their energy efficiency on their sleeves. But Dorrell has been involved with green building since those words connoted earth-rammed car tires and rooftop wind turbines. She was the first person to create a network of architects and builders. In 1995, the New York City venture evolved into Architects Designers and Contractors Network in Santa Fe, a network of building professionals who use sustainable technologies and teach students about them in a series of classes held at Santa Fe Community College’s Sustainable Technologies Center.

The other pervasive green building myth ADC Network combats, particularly since the economic downturn, is the belief that building green takes a lot of greenbacks. Many people work with draftsmen they meet through ADC classes instead of spending more money to hire an architect. Jack Johnston and Cathy Higgins took the classes before the economic downturn. After the economic climate changed, they ended up going house hunting instead of building their own. Johnston says the process was much more fun and less stressful than the couple’s past moves because they used their new knowledge of siting (building orientation and its effect on energy efficiency), solar technology, erosion control and other sustainable building principles. Johnston says the classes armed them with knowledge of what questions to ask and how to save money without compromising quality.

“It really helped my wife and I have conversations about what we wanted,” Johnston says. “I know from past experiences, guys think about things in a different way and it can be very frustrating. It just made all the conversations about what did we want in the house, what can we compromise on—it made all those conversations tremendously more easy.”

After Johnston and Higgins bought their new house in Eldorado, Johnston decided to build after all—a 400-square-foot woodworking studio for his furniture-making projects, working with a builder and contractor he met through the ADC classes.

Los Alamos resident Steve Greene also credits ADC classes with maintaining marital harmony throughout the home-building process—even in the wake of the catastrophic Cerro Grande fire. After the fire totaled their old house, Greene and his wife Ann chose three architects they met through ADC and set up a paid contest to see which could come up with the best plan based on their criteria.

“The ADC classes gave us more familiarity about how things go, how does one determine a price,” Steve Greene says. “It gave us much greater confidence in understanding both building styles as well as the process of building, and the various technologies that we could eventually incorporate into the design we came up with.”

The Greenses’ new home incorporates a lot of stone to absorb heat, a circulation system that allows fresh air in but filters out pollen, and rooftop solar panels to heat their water. A “skywalk” originating from their bedroom on the second floor leads out to a distinctive small deck overlooking Barrancas Canyon.

“A house is probably one of the most expensive things you’ll ever put money on, but you want to get it right, so this was a real big help,” Steve Greene says. “We had heard lots of horror stories from friends, ‘Oh, you’re going to build a house—a lot of people get divorced over that.’ But just getting all those facts out in front of you, hearing about it from those people that do this for a living was just so helpful in attuning us to what it was we liked or didn’t like when it was time to make those decisions.”

ADC is introducing a new class on energy-efficient remodeling beginning with the summer session. Other classes, which have applications both in retrofitting and new building projects, cover renewable energy, alternative building techniques and materials, and water harvesting.

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Teaching online through [www.GreenBuildingLearningCenter.com](http://www.GreenBuildingLearningCenter.com)**

Here is a small sample of off-grid / highly energy efficient homes we’ve designed and / or built in New Mexico. For a broader view of our residential & commercial projects go to [www.ADCNetwork.org](http://www.ADCNetwork.org)



Custom Home for Cerro Gordo fire survivors - built in 2003



Hacienda style home, Ruidoso, NM



Affordable home in Santa Fe - The German Passive House system. 2012



Affordable off-grid home for Cochiti Mesa fire survivors. 2012



High-end, energy efficient custom home in Tesuque, NM. 2004