



Green Home – A Shelter from the Storm

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ECO NOTES



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The old-timers had it right. When the original settlers of our area built their homes, whether they were Cherokee or European immigrants, they cleared only enough land for the house and their planting fields. All the trees that were taken down were reclaimed for the home, its furniture and fencing. Nothing went to waste. Materials did not come from half a world away as they do now, often saturated in petroleum.

Our original settlers built modest sized homes that were sited in the valley. They would never think to build them up on ridges. Necessity mandated that they were built in concert with nature, warmed by the sun by day while allowing air currents to flow for cooling in summer. In those days they weren't called "green homes." And the builders were not raving environmentalists. They were people of little means who made up for their lack of personal resources with resourcefulness and common sense.

These days, we can look back on their accomplishments as stellar examples of resilience in the face of difficult circumstances. Our circumstances today are different, but no less difficult. We may have our satellite dishes and blu-ray DVD players, all manner of gadgets and conveniences. But we also have our debt, a checkered economic forecast for the future and an environment that is littered with the results of living a cheap oil lifestyle. Contrary to recent news reports, the once vibrant Gulf of Mexico has been transformed into a sludge zone with many years of cleanup in the forecast. In our neck of the woods, the EPA has determined that one of the most hazardous coal ash dumps in the country sits next to the Progress Energy coal-fired power plant in Skyland, just a few feet from the French Broad River and I-26, major population centers and residential wells. Coal ash is the calling card of electric power in the South and it's a rich toxic soup of hazardous materials including lead, arsenic, mercury and other toxic heavy metals.

In this light, building green and retrofitting green is no longer a luxury that only the wealthy have access to. It's an absolute necessity for our own health, our environment's health and our economic security. In a sense, a green home is an insurance policy that protects us as energy prices rise and the future of fossil fuels increasingly remain in doubt.

For most of us, going green doesn't mean building a new green home, but taking steps to turn our brown home green. Fortunately, prices for solar have gone down steadily in the last few years. Meanwhile the federal and state governments offer some generous tax incentives for homeowners, whether you install substantial green features such as solar and geothermal, or just take some important energy efficiency steps.

The best way to learn about all of this is to see it for yourself. This year's ECO Green Home Tour offers some good contrast between city green homes and country living homes, all with exceptional green features. Some of the things you'll see on this year's tour include a restored historic apartment building with solar and water conservation features, a newly renovated classic country home with solar panels, cisterns and other stunning green innovations, a mountain home built with reclaimed lumber, radiant heating and goats in the backyard and much more. Included with every tour ticket is a hands-on solar workshop hosted by Advanced Thermal Solutions offering the opportunity to learn more about solar, how it works and how it might work for you.

The Green Home Tour is a self-guided tour that will be held this Saturday, August 21st from 10-4. Tickets are available online at www.eco-wnc.org, at the ECO office by calling 692-0385, and at the Hendersonville and Asheville Visitor's Centers. The tour is run in conjunction with the SEE Expo (Southern Energy and Environmental Expo) which is held all weekend at the WNC Ag Center offering a variety of workshops and lectures and access to green vendors. Tickets for the tour will also be available at SEE Expo at the ECO informational booth.

David Weintraub is Executive Director of ECO, the Environmental and Conservation Organization, which is dedicated to protecting the mountain region's natural heritage. ECO can be reached at (828) 692-0385 or online at www.eco-wnc.org.