



Sustainability in Suburbia

Louisville Couple Living by the “Three Rs”

By Debbie Slobe

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Debbie and Brian Slobe

Living simply and following the practices of “reduce, reuse, and recycle” have always been central to our adult lives. From registering with a charity rather than Crate & Barrel for our wedding, to buying used rather than new furniture, to evaluating the necessity of nearly every purchase we make, we are constantly challenging ourselves to live by these values.

In 2005 we moved from a condo in Boulder to our current home in Louisville to be closer to our jobs—Brian as an 8th-grade science teacher and me as a communications director for a wild-life conservation group. The move reduced our commutes from a half hour by car to only 15 minutes by bike.

Like all new homeowners, we were excited to add our style to the place and make energy-efficient improvements. We already had a few pieces of reclaimed furniture that Brian had refurbished into modern masterpieces. After moving into our home, we added to our eclectic collection with finds from Amazing Garage Sale and No Place Like Home in Boulder, Pacific Auction in Longmont, and various estate sales and consignment shops. At least 90 percent of our furniture is used.

Home improvements took a similar path. When we set out to put in landscaping, build shelves, replace doors, and other projects, we didn’t head to Home Depot. Instead, we first went to ReSource and salvaged friends’ and family’s discards—from reclaimed wood and doors to used countertops and fixtures.

In 2007 we turned our attention to our home’s systems. An aging furnace, insufficiently insulated attic, and old hot water heater were draining kilowatts from the grid. Our plan was to reduce our energy use as much as we could, then install solar panels. We started by having a home energy audit from the Center for Resource Conservation.

The audit revealed a multitude of ways we could reduce our energy use, including sealing all ducts, windows, and doors, and insulating the attic. We ended up implementing nearly every recommendation the auditor made, as well as installing a solar fan in the attic and a tankless hot water system that also heats our home. The integrated system takes the place of our old furnace and hot water heater for half the cost of replacing both.

After these improvements, we were ready to go solar. We hired SolSource of Denver to install a 4.4kW system that was turned on March 22, 2008. The system only cost 40 percent of its actual value, thanks to rebates made possible by Amendment 37 and tax credits.

Since installing the panels, we went from purchasing 450kW of electricity per month to zero. In fact, the system produces enough excess electricity to one day power a plug-in hybrid car. Indeed, Xcel is going to owe us money at the end of the year.

We are sincerely grateful to live in Boulder County, where there are so many resources and businesses to help people like us adhere to the Three Rs. We hope our experiences will inspire others to do the same.

Year Built, Improved: 1986, 2007–2008

Home Size: 1,780 sq. ft.

Contractors:

- Direct Drive Service (Tankless Hot Water System) (See ad on pg. 24)
- Go Green Flooring (Carpet)
- Kelly Moore (No-VOC paint)
- SolSource, LLC (PV System)
- Thermal Craft (Insulation)

★Energy Features

- Residential Energy Audit Program (REAP)
- Passive solar design
- Stone floors and counters in the south side of the house act as thermal mass
- 4.4kW grid-tied PV system
- Tankless hot water system provides water and space heating
- CFLs throughout
- Blown-in cellulose insulation in attic and ceiling, fiberglass in walls
- Sealed ducts in crawl space, air vents, plumbing entry points, and windows
- Insulated all electrical outlets
- Programmable thermostat
- ENERGY STAR appliances
- Solar-powered fan in attic
- Soft-sided hot tub compatible with PV system

🌿Green Features

- Utilized recycled lumber
- Corn-based carpet
- No-VOC and low-VOC

💧Water Features

- Xeriscape
- Drip irrigation
- Sprinkler with low-flow motorized heads
- Low-flow plumbing fixtures

♻️Re-use/Salvage Features

- Utilized paint from household hazardous waste give-aways
- Landscaping materials and doors from ReSource Yard
- Mulch is recycled from Christmas trees
- Nearly 100% of furniture reclaimed and restored, or bought used