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### SUSTAINING THE CITY

By [Holland Brown](#) | [Email the author](#) | December 27, 2010

[Business](#), [The Neighborhood Files](#)

## How to Be Tight With Energy and a Buck

Shore native and green builder Wes Harding says that common sense and small lifestyle changes can cost little and still make a big difference in your bills.

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What economical, energy-saving tips have worked for you? Or not? [Tell us in the comments.](#)



I always thought a green home was a luxury item--reserved for lucky few who can pay thousands extra for architects, solar panels and hand-salvaged lumber. Then I met Wes Harding, owner of Harding Construction and Sustainable Solutions ([www.hardingconstruction.biz](http://www.hardingconstruction.biz)) and a part of Long Beach's growing green-building movement.

Born and raised in Belmont Shore (a product of Lowell Elementary, Rogers Middle School and Wilson High School), Harding firmly believes that green building is a continuum of choices, large and small, expensive and free, that any homeowner with the right information can access.

When it comes to remodeling houses, Wes strikes me as part teacher, part physician and part behavioral therapist.

He begins by interviewing a homeowner to understand what their true needs are. According to Harding, "green is definitely a personal concept" because everyone has his/her own priorities and places different importance on each aspect of green building. I might be most concerned with saving water (yep, I've used that water-waster hotline), while my neighbor may be passionate about energy efficiency.

That leaves Harding with some teaching to do, because he sees the greenest approach to be an integrated one that focuses on "understanding how the whole house works as a system." So Harding likes to begin a remodel with a comprehensive energy audit. Like a physician, Harding uses special tools and stress tests to see how a house is really working--where the air leaks are, where moisture might be lurking, and how clogged the mechanical "arteries" might be. It costs less than \$1,000 but really helps a homeowner develop a cost/benefit-ranked hierarchy of improvement options.

Harding also advocates using common sense in our homes. Some of the most important changes you can make are the inexpensive ones--using compact fluorescent light bulbs, turning off lights when you leave rooms, putting your computer in sleep mode and taking short showers. All of these require us to break bad habits, rather than spend a lot of money, and Wes feels "those are always the things that are going to give us an immediate return on our investment." Other important changes do not require a full remodel--like switching to Energy Star appliances and getting rid of that ancient fridge in the garage that holds one can of beer for most of the year.

"Time to get a cooler" says Wes, and get rid of the fridge, because old refrigerators consume tons of power.

What is the most common problem with Belmont Shore-area homes?

According to Wes, they typically are drafty due to lack of insulation and old windows. And they take on passive heat at times when you don't want it. For instance, windows that face south without shading from an awning, tree or neighbor's house receive constant sun. We all know how uncomfortable our homes can be at 4 p.m. on a day when the Santa Ana Winds are blowing. By addressing the glass in these old homes, or adding operable skylights, or a whole-house fan, you can greatly improve comfort and sometimes even eliminate the need to install air conditioning.

"People don't realize how much more satisfied they could be with their living spaces," according to Wes, who feels there is no need to "sweat it out in the Shore or run your AC every day when you have a view of the ocean."

Wes recently bought and remodeled his own original bungalow in Belmont Heights. He got an energy efficiency mortgage that allowed him to include some of his green features in the principal of his 30-year loan. You'll see no blingy green features--like solar panels--from the street. His upgrades were common-sense changes with a quick payback. He overhauled the HV/AC system, installing a right-sized, efficient model in the attic. He used reclaimed cabinets and Energy Star appliances in the kitchen. He installed recycled-content bathroom tiles, a dual-flush toilet, and a solar tube that provides all the daytime light he needs without electricity. And he built a simple gray water system for watering the backyard--a bypass valve from the washing machine drain that allows him to send the used water into the landscaping. His sole splurge was organic cotton bedding, because who wants to sleep on off-gassing chemicals, right?

Whether you are interested in a whole green remodel, improving your living comfort, or saving a few dollars on your energy bill, here is Wes's advice: Start with changing your homeowner behaviors, consider upgrading your appliances, and have a complete a comprehensive energy audit before investing in any big- ticket items, like solar panels.

For information on rebates, Wes recommends [www.energyupgradecalifornia.com](http://www.energyupgradecalifornia.com).

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[Mike King](#)

11:39 am on Tuesday, December 28, 2010

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Nice article! There's also a good eco-living companion piece in the LAT from October concerning lessons learned and "what works and what doesn't":

<http://www.latimes.com/features/home/la-hm-realist-main-20101016.0.7206697.story>

Incidentally, I'm unsure of the etiquette of posting a link to another news source. My apologies if this is a moronic faux pas. ;-)

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[Dawn Allard](#)

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