



The Green Architect

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Shift From Automatic

Do you consider yourself to be environmentally aware? Have you ever considered walking or biking to work? What about public transportation? Carpooling or driving a FlexCar? Remember Steve Martin in *LA Story* driving in his car to visit his neighbor just 30 feet away? Well, he's not alone. Thirty percent of trips Americans take in the car are within one mile of their homes. Whether it's to save time or just habit, jumping in our car has become "automatic."

The challenge in thinking sustainably is slowing ourselves down to consider things differently. If you don't personally have the time, then consider assigning a staff member to do research or hire a sustainable design consultant to help you improve your knowledge about new products and ways of thinking—fast.

Just like the personal choices we have, there are almost always more environmentally sensitive options for our profession. Without the awareness of the environmental impact of our tastes in the past, the public has come to believe that what is beautiful is often inappropriate for a particular climate. As we challenge ourselves and our clients to look at things differently, the kinds of

automatic" ideas and designs we create will change.

With such a challenge can come multiple levels of benefit. Since I began taking the bus to work, I've been able to reduce the need for gym visits, notice the amazingly fragrant plants along my way, and study the many beautiful building details that cannot be appreciated from a car. I also get a lot of reading done when someone else is driving.

It's the same way with landscaping. I recently attended a class at the Theodore Payne Foundation Nursery in Sun Valley (theodorepayne.org). I wanted to learn more about the plants I've been encouraging clients to use. I was surprised to learn that "native" doesn't necessarily mean drought tolerant. The real beauty of these plants is their incredible fragrance, and efficient maintenance due to their climate appropriateness. Once established, they are heartier, healthier, and need little or no fertilizers and bug repellents.

Let's stop thinking about parking lots as being asphalt, about front yards as traditional lawns, about windows as inoperable, about roofs as asphalt shingles, and ventilation systems as 100% mechanical. Think about using the cheap recycled concrete (broken down to gravel size) for parking areas or patios; think about donating your deconstruction materials for your clients' tax benefit (thereusepeople.org); think permeable paving; think no-mow lawns (ocregister.com/ocregister/life/homegarden/garden_homegarden/abox/article_1240033.php); think subsurface irrigation (netafim-usa-landscape.com/Landscape/press_0600RenoGJ.php); think plywood composite beams; think natural ventilation; think recycled plastic roof shingles. Talk to your clients about these options from the very beginning so that they can envision the same.

In closing, designing sustainably requires starting at the beginning. "Green" is in the mainstream and clients are questioning why architects DON'T bring up sustainable design when it's good for the environment, their family's or employees' health, and their