



MAKE MYSELF AT HOME | by Sarah Sinclair

MEGHAN BIERLE



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ADDRESS: 320 East Victoria Street
STATUS: Not for Sale

Ten Years of Living in a Green Project

Tucked on a quiet block just down the street from Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden sits a lovely Victorian house built in 1887. Passersby are likely to admire this home, unaware that it is part of one of Santa Barbara's most noteworthy green developments. When I went to visit last week, I had to double-check the address. But once I walked down the side path under an arched entryway laden with figs and into a central garden bustling with hummingbirds, I knew I was in the right place.

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not met expectations is the 14,000-gallon bladder in the basement with its automated controls. The water collection has worked well, but using it for irrigation has had to be done manually. In hindsight, the design and construction of this system was unproven and too innovative.

During the build, you focused on harnessing the energy of the sun. How has that worked out? The passive solar design has kept internal temperatures between 70 and 80 degrees year-round, varying no more than 1.5 degrees in any 24-hour period. The thermal mass from two layers of drywall, the tight shell containing extra insulation, the high-performance windows, the motorized awnings on south-facing windows, and capturing the natural breezes have yielded better performance than the computer modeling predicted. The heating system has never been turned on in 10 years. With the high temperatures and bad outdoor air quality in recent weeks, we kept the windows closed and used the ceiling fans for moving air with excellent results.

Using the sun to heat water has provided all of our hot-water needs. The photovoltaic panels generate most of the electricity we use in our all-electric condo. Our plan for zero net energy had to be compromised a little, however, because the Historic Landmarks Commission did not want panels to be visible, even looking down from the Riviera.

Another goal of the project was to minimize cars. How has that played out? The hydraulic car lifts have worked well and limited parking to less than 10 percent of the property. Limiting space for cars allowed the creation of a courtyard garden for communal eating, growing vegetables, harvesting from 30 fruit trees, and growing drought-tolerant plants to attract birds and beneficial insects. The abundance and diversity of butterflies, dragonflies, bees — we have a productive beehive

—hummingbirds, and other bird species create an endless display of wonder. We never realized how much biodiversity there can be on a small urban lot. Living in the middle of town, we've found that we need our cars even less than we thought we would.

The home was designed for aging in place. Any comments on this? The many universal design features, elevator included, had surprising benefits for our family when we had a baby granddaughter living upstairs. Getting her up- and downstairs via the elevator when she was asleep in her stroller was a big plus. As she got older, we started cooking with her on the ultra-safe induction cooker. The aging question for the rest of us is so far untested!

On the way out, I asked Dennis if I could peek at their beehive. We marveled at the honeybees and their intricate hierarchy. As we said goodbye, I took one last look at this serene oasis in the middle of the city. It might be that Victoria Garden Mews is more than the greenest project in town — perhaps it contains the fountain of youth.



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longtime Santa Barbara-based builder Dennis Allen. He and the team at Allen Construction set out to build something as sustainable and innovative as possible. Victoria Garden Mews is a four-unit, multi-family project that required heavily remodeling the home in front while simultaneously building three condominium units in the back. When completed, the complex earned a Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council's

LEED for Homes program, boasting a score of 118 out of 136. It was, at the time, the highest ranking for any residential project.

Ten years later, I caught up with builder and resident Dennis Allen. He showed me around his home as we talked about how the project was performing.

Looking back over the past 10 years, how has it been living in one of the greenest residential projects in the country? It has met or surpassed our expectations in almost every way: beauty, comfort, quiet, and interaction with fellow residents. The one system that has

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