



Innovators: Building a Greener World

SDA founder Steven Strong stands in front of what he calls a “21st Century Farmstead”, a residence in northern New England that, despite the harsh winter climate and modest solar resources, gets its heat, hot water and electricity from renewable energy with sufficient surplus solar-generated electricity to provide for the owners’ local transportation needs when plug-in hybrids become widely available – about 18 months from now. Strong wants to make solar power the standard for homes.

A New Plan for the Planet. Protecting the earth means rethinking how we build, one solar panel at a time.

FOR A LONG TIME, WHEN PEOPLE THOUGHT about the environment, they thought mostly about things they wanted to conserve: forests, species, oceans. But now we know that environmentalism is also about things we produce: homes, offices, factories. The Innovators we bring you here are all involved with what has come to be known as

“Green Building”. They include a Massachusetts “solar zealot” making solar power more affordable, a couple in India developing eco-friendly communities, an Italian promoting concrete that “eats” pollution and a Texas crusader for greener hospitals. They all want a world where concern for the earth is “built in” from the start.

Steven Strong He's working to bring down the cost of solar power for homes, so that lots more households can afford it.

ENGINEER He used to be a "solar zealot". Those are Steven Strong's own words. "Even back in the solar-crazy '70s", he says, "It used to be an open question if anyone could survive trying to sell homes that produce all the power they need through the use of renewable energy resources."

It wasn't exactly a smooth ride, but survive he did. Along the way, Strong, 56, whose firm, Solar Design Associates, is based in Harvard, Mass, turned himself into one of the nations' foremost experts on solar buildings.

His initial break came when, in 1980, he found a manufacturer to produce his "integrated" solar roof. The first of its kind, it provided an alternative to the costlier – and clunkier – solar panels that are just slapped onto rooftops.

Strong is very aware that solar can increase the cost of a house by about 15-20%. One way to push down costs is through economies of scale which is why he's serving as consultant to the Sonoma Mountain Village project, planned by California developer, Coddling Enterprises, and scheduled for ground breaking late next year.

"For the first time," explains Strong, a developer has set course to create an entire town built according to principals of sustainability while keeping it competitively priced.

Located 45 minutes north of San Francisco, the project is an entire community of environmentally conscious – and solar-powered – apartments, homes and stores. "This", says Strong, "is solar for the people."



Future farmers of America Solar-powered farmstead in Northern New England