

realtor profile

Brigid Meier, Coldwell Banker Lota Realty

Brigid Meier: What does “GREEN” really mean

Brigid Meier began her real estate career in Taos 10 years ago after she completed the Permaculture Design Course twice — once with founder Bill Mollison and again at Tesuque Pueblo. Meier says, “Bill asked why weren’t there any permaculture Realtors out there? And it struck a ‘right livelihood’ chord with me.”

In 1994 Meier was a delegate from Tierra Madre, an NGO in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico to the first United Nations Programme on Sustainability. She was promoting San Miguel as a demonstration site for sustainability, a designation that 14 years later Brigid believes could actually be obtained here in Taos. “With its natural beauty, clean air, acequias and agrarian base, Taos could successfully qualify for this honor. Meeting the criteria would bring the community, environmental groups, schools and churches together in a common goal to create a healthy, self-sufficient environment. Why couldn’t this become a reality?” she asks.

But what does it have to do with real estate? “Well, everything.” Meier says. “My current venue for activism is through Sustain Taos whose focus is on food and shelter for Northern New Mexico. Real estate allows room to educate, interact with policymaking and encourage responsible growth.”

To this end, Meier has helped develop El Parque en Taos, the first Leadership in Energy and Environment Design (LEED) residential project in New Mexico. “The Green Building Council of America’s LEED program is the first to create standards for defining what is green. El Parque is a visionary project that meets those requirements; an El Parque condominium requires 43 percent less energy than a conventional one.”

After researching LEED specifications and studying to become an eco-broker, Meier now questions what is advertised as “green”. “In the past I, too, was guilty of ‘green wash’— promoting a home as green that was simply made out of adobe and had thermopane windows — but we owe it to the public to hold higher standards. There are also many paradoxes. Is an off-the-grid home 30 to 40 miles out of town more or less green than a centrally located condo that requires little driving?”

As of Sept. 1, the Taos MLS is now providing thorough categories for bona fide green features that will help both consumers and sellers.

Meier says that even if there isn’t an independent auditor tallying up points for certification as there is in the LEED program, many factors can help one determine how green a home is. Meanwhile, many people are unsure of the differences between high performance, energy-efficient and environmentally sensitive



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRIGID MEIER

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(not using any materials that could trigger an allergic reaction in someone who is environmentally ill) categories.

“Today, because of the rising cost of heating fuel, I would encourage clients to obtain a professional energy audit on any home before purchasing it. If it’s an older home, get data on past utility bills and see how much potential there is to retrofit and whether that cost makes sense in terms of energy savings. It would be great to know, for instance, whether or not there was insulation in the slab and its R-value as well as the R-value of the walls and ceiling.

New homes being built today need at least a 30-degree solar aspect; there’s no excuse for not taking advantage of all the sunny days in Taos. Rain catchment and grey-water re-use are essential for water conservation. Superior heating components should no longer be ‘added value’; they should become the norm, as should Energy Star appliances. Although there may be some upfront costs, these “green” enhancements will pay for themselves many times over during the upcoming years. And often state and federal tax credits, refunds and rebates can help offset their initial expense.”

To help consumers navigate these issues and answer questions, Meier offers a free energy checklist and what to look for that will help you determine what is and is not “green”. Give her a call or e-mail her. Meier has been on the environmental front lines for many years and she is committed to helping both her clients and Taos become savvy about sustainability. www.laplaza.org

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