

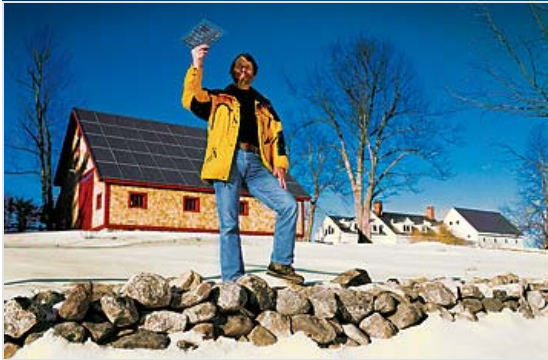
TIME

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Steven Strong

By Stefanie Friedhoff / Harvard

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

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 nation's foremost experts on solar buildings. His initial breakthrough came in 1980, when he found a manufacturer to build 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 about 15%. One way to push down cost is through economies of scale, which is why he's serving as consultant for the Sonoma Mountain Village Project, planned by California developer Coddling Enterprises and scheduled for groundbreaking late next year.

"For the first time," explains Strong, "a developer has set course to create an entire town built according to principles 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, houses and stores. "This," says Strong, "is solar for the people."