

FOLLOW THE GREEN LEADERS

IN HONOR OF EARTH DAY (APRIL 22), WE ASKED EXPERTS IN THE SUSTAINABLE LIVING MOVEMENT IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TO OFFER INSPIRATION FOR GREENER WAYS TO BUILD, WORK, VACATION AND EAT.

BY AMANDA ANDERSON

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Opposite Page: Open space in Crystal Cove State Park owned by The Irvine Company; this page: The Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach (left); the Studio garden at Montage Laguna Beach

Ask experts and leaders in the sustainable living movement in Southern California what the greatest threat to our environment is, and their answer may surprise you. “It’s lack of exposure to the outdoors,” says Bo Glover, director of the Environmental Nature Center (ENC) in Newport Beach. “You can’t imagine how many kids come here off of school buses and this is their first experience in nature. Children today have such a tremendous disconnect with the natural world. Their faces are in front [of] a screen. That’s where we fill our greatest role in our community: giving kids an opportunity to interact with nature.”

The ENC strives to be the community’s foremost authority on ecological responsibility, sustainable practices and environmental education. On just five acres hidden between Pacific Coast Highway and a street lined with strip malls, the ENC offers exposure to 13 different native California plant communities, a butterfly house and a building that was the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum-certified structure in Orange County. The center is making not just an impression on young students, but also on developers, construction professionals and design students that come to tour a building that is so efficient, they receive a refund check from Southern California Edison.

It’s leading institutions like the ENC that offer hope for those who want to live a more sustainable lifestyle. And we need hope, because the simple problem—we don’t care to save what we don’t appreciate—leads to a more complex question: Once we come to value our natural world and see how it is being threatened, how do we make meaningful lifestyle changes in a metropolitan sprawl?

Among these challenges, there is hope. Look around and you’ll see educators, developers, builders, landlords, hotels and gardeners implementing changes that are shifting our landscape. So, if you’re looking to make changes, just follow these leaders.

BUILD, WORK, CONSERVE

In addition to acting as director of the Environmental Nature Center, Glover now serves on the newly incorporated Orange County

Market Advisory Board of the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). The USGBC is a national organization that connects people, programs and resources to create green buildings. In 2000, the USGBC launched the LEED certification program, a third-party process that offers distinctions for energy-efficient and sustainable buildings. Many local companies seek to go green without obtaining LEED certification, but as Glover says, “If you want to really build a sustainable building, the process will hold you accountable.”

This new market advisory board does more than focus on LEED certifications. It also brings together holistically-minded individuals who are working toward large-scale lifestyle changes. Also on the board is Robyn Vettraino, president of the sustainability consulting firm Verde, executive director of the Newport Banning Land Trust, and a former executive member of the Surfrider Foundation. With a degree in architecture and a passion for finding balance between the built world and the natural world, Vettraino is also focused on sociological connections necessary to going green.

THE IRVINE COMPANY’S GREEN STANDARD

Vettraino says that in Southern California, we constantly drive by examples of a leader who has worked to build sustainable communities, and to find a balance between business and environmental concerns for decades: The Irvine Company.

In the late 1970s, The Irvine Company’s innovative village-like design of Woodbridge (which was mimicked later by communities like Northwood and Woodbury), set a national standard for walkable suburban communities. And though we have seen loss of ranch land to accommodate a growing population, over 60 percent of the original 93,000 acres of the Irvine Ranch is permanently preserved open space.

Today, The Irvine Company is California’s largest LEED portfolio owner. More than 60 office towers totaling 18.4 million square feet have been awarded LEED certification by the USGBC in the “LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance” category. In 2015, Irvine Company launched an initiative to become the world’s