

# Sustainability Series Session #1: The Many Facets of Insulating a Home

Tonight, January 17th, is the first of Golden Real Estate's 6-part Sustainability Series. The topic this week is home insulation. Allow me to introduce the presenters and to share some of what I myself have learned from insulating my own homes and office, and from 17 years of selling homes and being active in the sustainability arena.

We have two great presenters at tonight's session. One is **Steve Stevens**, whose passion since retiring from Bell Labs has been the conversion of an energy-wasting 1970s brick ranch into a showpiece of sustainability through solar power, energy efficiency and super insulation. In addition to having insulation blown into his attic and walls, he had layers of poly-iso and structural insulated panels added to his exterior walls. Then he went so far as to dig out and expose his home's foundation walls so poly-iso insulation could be applied to them. He also constructed "air locks" on all entrances, and built a greenhouse on his south-facing exposure — both extremely effective insulating techniques.

Several years ago when Steve's home was on the Golden Solar Tour, I shot a 40-minute video in which Steve described his home's sustainability features -- by far the longest of all the videos I have ever created for homes on that annual tour. A link to the video is at [JimSmithColumns.com](http://JimSmithColumns.com).

## The Graying of the Internet — What About Readability?

I've written before about the subject of readability, both in print and online — a subject that is dear to me not only as a senior citizen with naturally reduced visual acuity, but as a former typographer trained in what makes one font more readable than another.

It's bad enough that more and more publications and most web pages use sans serif fonts like Arial, but there's another strange trend of *graying* those typefaces — literally. Have you noticed?

The rest of this article is 100% black Times Roman. These two sentences are 50% black Arial. Not as readable, right? Why publishers and webmasters would choose to reduce the readability of their product in this way is beyond me.

In an ideal world, sans serif fonts such as Arial would be used only for headlines, bigger and bolder. On the other hand, body text like you're reading here should be in a serif font such as this Times Roman or, my favorite, Georgia.

You can join me in my quest. Start by changing the default font in your email program to *your* favorite serif typeface.

**PS:** I can celebrate that starting this week, the Denver Post is allowing this ad to be in Times Roman instead of Arial, which was required previously, so we are making progress!

The other presenter is **Dennis Brachfield of About Saving Heat**. I've known Dennis for over 25 years. His company insulated an office building I owned in Denver as well as a couple homes I have owned. Dennis is bringing a blower door to this evening's session in order to demonstrate its function. Using a fan to depressurize a home, a blower door helps to identify the location and extent of air leaks in a building. Another tool Dennis will illustrate is an infrared camera. By pointing it toward ceilings and exterior walls, the camera shows the difference in surface temperatures, indicating areas that could benefit from air sealing and/or additional insulation.

I'll never forget the time 15 years ago when Dennis blew insulation into the exterior walls of a 1945 wood-frame bungalow I had purchased. The home's gas forced-air furnace kept the ambient temperature at 70 degrees easily enough, but occupants still felt cold. Dennis pointed out that even if there was insulation in the walls, voids surely existed, due to a combination of sub-par installation and years of settling. I was amazed at how much more comfortable the house was after having insulation blown in to fill all those voids. What I learned from that experience was that cold walls radiate coldness just as effectively as warm walls radiate warmth. Thus, a room with 70-degree air but cold walls feels cold in comparison to a room with the same air temperature but with walls that aren't cold.

My current home was super-insulated by **Bill Lucas-Brown of GB3 Energy**. I invited Bill to join us tonight, but he had a previous commitment. On [www.GB3Energy.com](http://www.GB3Energy.com), you can watch a Golden Solar Tour video I shot in which Bill

describes his weatherization work, which included insulating the crawl space and the rim joist area. It's very informative.

Here's a simple way to determine how well insulated your home is. When you go to bed on a cold winter night and turn your thermostat down — let's say from 71 to 67 — look to see how quickly the home cools to that lower setting, triggering the furnace. If it's less than a couple of hours, you could probably benefit from improved insulation of your home. I've started turning our thermostat down an hour or more *before* bedtime and I've found that the temperature doesn't drop enough to trigger the furnace until 3 a.m. or later.

When your home is that "tight" it's important to ensure the introduction of enough fresh air to maintain good indoor air quality. For that, consider installing an "energy recovery ventilator," or ERV. This device replaces a standard vent fan with a heat exchanger that warms incoming fresh air by extracting heat from the interior air that is being exhausted.

The ERV's function will be explained in our session — or you can Google "energy recovery ventilation."

### Tonight's Session on Insulation Is Full, But Will Be Archived

With 30 sign-ups, we have no room for more attendees at tonight's opening session of our Sustainability Series. However, we will, as with all future sessions, archive a video of the session at [www.SustainabilitySeries.info](http://www.SustainabilitySeries.info).

There are 10 or more people already registered for each of the remaining five monthly sessions, described on that same website. Register before it's too late by emailing me at [Jim@GoldenRealEstate.com](mailto:Jim@GoldenRealEstate.com).

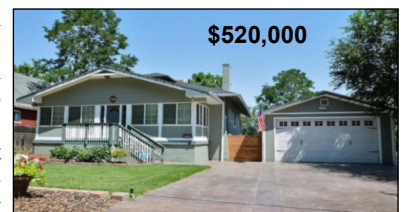
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