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There are few better ways to capture and hold the sun's warmth than through the use of adobe. With sunny days 70 percent of the time, Santa Fe has become one of the leading centers for development of solar energy in the nation. Many solar houses have been constructed here, and Wayne and Susan Nichols are largely responsible.

"We have taken a system used for thousands of years by the Indians and added new technology," Wayne Nichols said as he showed me a house with a fuel bill for last year of only \$38 (understand, it snows in Santa Fe). "When the utility company came out to read the electric meter, they thought the thing was broke."

The Nicholsons arrived in Santa Fe to stay in 1972, she a mathematician and he with degrees in business administration. Their first solar project was a subdivision of eight houses, each on five acres. Next came La Vereda, with 19 units. "Our goal is to build cities that reflect new forms, new types of energy efficiency. For example, we'd like to build a subdivision where each home buyer will get an electric car."

The houses in La Vereda each have a large south-facing window. The heat that enters can be stored in the floors and walls or, most successfully, in what is called a Trombe wall of adobe or masonry. And when the sun falls, and a chill sets in the air, the release of the heat into the house has begun.

"We want to perfect passive solar energy here and then take it to other parts of the country, to Los Angeles, Kansas City," Wayne Nichols said. "It's no accident that we're doing this in Santa Fe. If you want to innovate and experiment, it's not scary here."