Striving for sustainability

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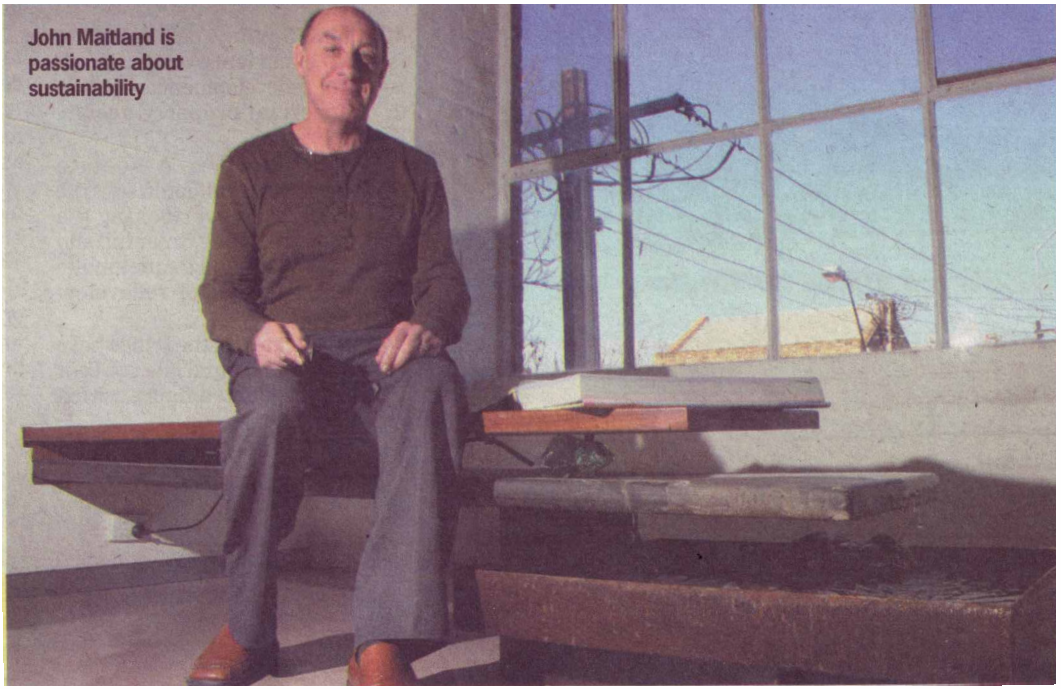

John Maitland is passionate about sustainability

When we meet, John Maitland, director of Energy Architecture (EA) is emersed several metres into the ground, wearing blue socks and heaving black boxes. He explains he is constructing a rainwater tank for a house – this is clearly no ordinary architect!

While EA is recognised as a company with a high profile for design and commercial credibility, it specialises in achieving environmentally sustainable outcomes.

Maitland has long been a sustainability advocate, saying the "heart of the planet is what drives (his) passion for sustainability."

EA consults on sustainability by planning urban design that emphasises this and establishing sustainability targets from research results.

Maitland established EA in 1990 and since then, the company has been involved in an array of projects in commercial, educational, ecotourism, residential and planning and development areas.

Not restricted to metropolitan projects, Maitland says he enjoys working in rural environments and using local materials because there is "a delicious culture in rural areas, it's so genuine and earthy."

Of particular interest is his creation of the Aldinga Arts Village, a project that began 17 years ago and is now a completely functioning village "fostering art in a social and environmental context that is ecologically sustainable."

Almost 50 energy-efficient houses complete with rainwater tanks are contained in the village which aims to generate a "strong community environment" where there are no fences, socially responsible by-laws and plans for a multi-purpose community centre. A hippy village? Not so.

Maitland says the village tenants comprise an eclectic mix of people who "recognise the value of community and want to live in a healthily-centred village."

Maitland thinks Adelaide is eager to enhance "the art of architecture in an ecologically responsible direction, which is incredibly exciting."

When questioned about the strength of his desire for sustainability in his work, Maitland simply says: "It's about loving the environment.

"If you are touched by the wind that moves the trees, why wouldn't you do what you can to maintain that?"