



From sustainable architecture to organic vodka, from biodegradable cleaning products to the state's first certified “organic hotel,” the Bay Area is a hotbed of entrepreneurs, authors, teachers and city officials who are on the cutting edge

## THE GREEN

of living green. Here, they tell us why they do it, debate the idea that saving money and the environment don't mix and even divulge a guilty pleasure or two. Best of all, they show how we can easily do our part—right here, right now.

BY ROBIN RINALDI

**Green, and sometimes even organic, can be vague terms. How do you define them?**

ADAM LOWRY: I define *green* in terms of living sustainably—consuming goods and services in a way that doesn't compromise future generations' ability to do the same.

DANIEL SIDER: In my work [as director of city greening], greening is much more than just trees and landscaping. City Greening targets the entire public realm in order to make our streets, sidewalks, parks and plazas more functional, beautiful, safe and ecologically responsive. It's the sustainable union of urban design, environmental stewardship, land use and transportation planning.

ERIC COREY FREED: I call my company organicARCHITECT in deference to Frank Lloyd Wright, who created the term to define a process of design focused on creativity and nature. I'm continuing that tradition through sustainable and unique buildings.

from hand-picking organic rose geraniums grown in Marin for hand soap to using recyclable bottles.

STEFAN MÜHLE: *Green* means environmentally conscious and sustainable from the inside out, helping us minimize our carbon footprint.

ALLISON EVANOW: I define it as any person, product or company that strives to make conscious choices favorable to the earth.

SUE REDDING: Being green is about making conscious choices that are good for the environment. *Green* is often interchangeable with *sustainable*, although no one in the industrial-design world is crazy about either term—*sustainable* sort of implies "staying the same," and being green is all about making changes.

**Why did you start a green business?**

LOWRY: Because I worked as a global-warming scientist for several years trying to make a difference, and realized that private-sector business



“THE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT [OF A TERRAPASS] is much greater than that of driving a hybrid, and it's easy.”

—architect Eric Corey Freed



DAVID SPARROW: As an ideology, *green* means understanding the interconnectedness of everything and that nature rewards efficiency and simplicity. As a product, it means the product life cycle minimizes negative environmental costs.

SUSAN GRIFFIN-BLACK: *Green* means respecting the earth in everything that we do,

had the greatest opportunity for creating change through inspired product design and a sustainably focused business model.

FREED: For me, sustainability has always been the obvious direction. After all, what is the business case for using materials to their extinction, or designing a building to flagrantly waste energy, or shaping rooftops to ignore the water falling upon them? In a time when millions go thirsty, we flush our toilets with clean drinking water.

SPARROW: We started A Happy Planet to promote clean/green companies and people's health simultaneously.

GRIFFIN-BLACK: We've always felt that blending our beliefs with our business is

the only way to operate, which means that we are mindful of our impact on the planet, the well-being of people who work for us, and the health of our customers. We wanted our customers to enjoy a little bit of luxury every day without sacrificing their values.

MÜHLE: We hope it's going to be a standard soon, and we wanted to get a head start.

SUSAN GRIFFIN-BLACK is cofounder, along with her husband, Brad Black, of EO ([eoproducts.com](http://eoproducts.com)) in Corte Madera—a bath and body line based on essential oils.



ALLISON EVANOW is founder and CEO of Square One Organic Vodka ([squareonevodka.com](http://squareonevodka.com)), a company based in Novato that distills the first certified organic vodka made from American rye.



ERIC COREY FREED is founder and principal of organicARCHITECT ([organicarchitect.com](http://organicarchitect.com)), a local architecture firm specializing in sustainable design. He's also an author and a college instructor.



ADAM LOWRY is cofounder, along with Eric Ryan, of Method ([methodhome.com](http://methodhome.com)), a company located in the Financial District that makes nontoxic, biodegradable household-cleaning products.



STEFAN MÜHLE is general manager of Union Square's Orchard Garden Hotel ([theorchardgardenhotel.com](http://theorchardgardenhotel.com)), the first California hotel certified by the U.S. Green Building Council.



SUE REDDING is assistant professor of industrial design at the California College of the Arts in SF ([cca.edu](http://cca.edu)), where she teaches the "Design and Culture" class focusing on sustainable practices.



DANIEL SIDER is San Francisco's director of city greening ([sf.gov](http://sf.gov)), a position created by Mayor Gavin Newsom in 2005 to improve the quality of public spaces.



DAVID SPARROW is cofounder, with Kevin Kirby, of A Happy Planet ([ahappyplanet.com](http://ahappyplanet.com)), an SF-based company that sells organic bedding and home accessories.



Orchard Garden was inspired by its 83-year-old owner, Mrs. S. C. Huang. She's passionate about clean environments after the untimely cancer-related deaths of three family members, so she devoted herself to creating an environmentally safe and sustainable hotel.

**What's the biggest challenge of mixing profit and eco-friendliness?**

SPARROW: Our margins are often smaller compared with [those of] conventional products, so we have to take less profit to be competitive in the greater market.

MÜHLE: Up-front costs in some arenas, cost-prohibitive returns on investment (for instance, with solar energy) and lack of subsidies.

EVANOW: It's generally less cost-effective to

even more so, than the conventional products out there.

FREED: As far as architecture goes, most people seemed shocked to learn of the dangers traditional products pose in the home. We spend 80 to 90 percent of our time indoors, and we fill our buildings with toxic materials. We paint our walls with oil-based paint, cover our floors with toxic varnishes and adhesives, build our cabinets with formaldehyde-filled boards—all of which give off nasty chemicals. Most people incorrectly assume the building codes protect us from such things.

SPARROW: I sell organic bedding. All bedding—and food and everything else—was organic until the advent of chemical-based farming in the 1940s. Now we call organic farming the “alternative style.” It's silly.

MÜHLE: People are still surprised that being green and enjoying luxury aren't mutually exclusive anymore.

EVANOW: Here's one example of a surprising phenomenon: Our fermentation waste, or “stillage,” is so high in fiber and protein because of its light processing that we can actually sell it to organic dairy farms as cattle feed.

REDDING: That green design is making well-made—i.e., very durable—products a thing of the past. In our current economy, it's no longer in a company's best interest to make

products that will last a lifetime. Companies want to release new versions of products every few years, at most. So green industrial designers have to think about a product's “end of useful life,” and create products that can be efficiently disposed of. In the past, it was important to design long-lasting products, but now designers must create a product with recycling and disassembly in mind so that when its life ends—and they all do—it can be easily disposed of.

**If you could have our readers do some very simple things to reduce their environmental footprint, what would they be?**

LOWRY: The three biggest areas are personal transportation, energy usage and food. I would say recycle, don't drink bottled water, and fly and drive less. Other tips would include taking public transport, paying more for your food and eating less of it, unplugging cell phones and computers when not in use, using compact fluorescent bulbs and Energy Star appliances—and if you're really committed, offsetting your driving, flying and home-energy use with renewable energy or reforestation credits.

SIDER: Take a weekend afternoon to plant a street tree. San Francisco's urban forest has

among the least tree coverage of any American city, and even so, it removes 300 tons of pollutants each year, all the while making our neighborhoods more livable and increasing property values. You can volunteer with the Department of Public Works [[sfdpw.org](http://sfdpw.org)] or Friends of the Urban Forest [[fuf.net](http://fuf.net)] to help meet our yearly goal of 5,000 new trees. Also, use the city's corner stores. Get a gallon of milk or a loaf of bread whenever you need it without getting in your car.

FREED: First, energy: Change your bulbs to compact fluorescents, switch your thermostat to a timer model and insulate your water heater. These are all easy things that save an enormous amount of energy. Secondly, cleaners: Switch to healthy cleaning products like Seventh Generation [[seventhgen.com](http://seventhgen.com)], Method [[methodbome.com](http://methodbome.com)] or Simple Green [[simplegreen.com](http://simplegreen.com)]. Lastly, buy a TerraPass [[terrapass.com](http://terrapass.com)] to offset your carbon emissions from your car or your home. The environmental benefit is much greater than that of driving a hybrid, and it's easy to do.

SPARROW: Drive less, buy local and organic and reuse stuff whenever possible.

GRIFFIN-BLACK: Buy local, organic food from small businesses, and don't shop at Wal-Mart. In other words, know who is making the products you use. Know them personally.

MÜHLE: Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents. Save water by using low-flow devices in your showerheads and faucets, and bathe with a friend! Take public transportation—or better yet, walk.

EVANOW: Power down computers at night, wear heavier clothing in winter and turn down the heat. Buy organics. Recycle and repurpose.

“TAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORT... and pay more for your food and eat less of it.”

—Method cofounder Adam Lowry



produce products in an eco-friendly fashion; with tighter margins, we have to be more creative than our non-green competitors.

REDDING: Companies care about the “bottom line,” and as of today being green isn't cheaper. Most companies are quite pragmatic about it—they won't go “green” unless it is profitable. We need to get the manufacturers of green products to realize that if they create equal or superior-quality products at a reasonable price, people will buy them.

SIDER: Corporate education is key. In cities like San Francisco, profit and green design go hand in hand. Our local market clamors for sustainable, eco-friendly products, and generally consumers are willing to pay a slight premium for them. Savvy builders and retailers have caught on to this and are doing quite nicely.

LOWRY: The biggest challenge is the perception that the two are mutually exclusive or opposing forces. They aren't. Green business is actually quite lucrative.

FREED: To me it's ripe with opportunity.

**What would people be surprised to learn about green products?**

LOWRY: That they can be as high-performance,

“ALL BEDDING AND FOOD WAS ORGANIC until the advent of chemical-based farming in the 1940s. Now we call organic farming ‘alternative.’ It's silly.”

—David Sparrow, cofounder of A Happy Planet



## OUR ROUNDTABLE'S FAVORITE LOCAL GREEN RESOURCES

### RESTAURANTS/ CAFES

**CAFE GRATITUDE**  
1336 Ninth Ave.  
2400 Harrison St.  
415-824-4652  
withthecurrent.com

**GREENS RESTAURANT**  
Fort Mason Center,  
Building A  
415-771-6222  
greensrestaurant.com

**HERBIVORE**  
531 Divisadero St.  
415-885-7133  
983 Valencia St.  
415-826-5657  
herbivorerestaurant.com

**INSALATA'S**  
120 Sir Francis  
Drake Blvd.  
San Anselmo  
415-457-7700  
insalatas.com

**MIETTE PATISSERIE**  
Ferry Building  
Marketplace  
415-837-0300  
miettecakes.com

**MIXT GREENS**  
120 Sansome St.  
415-433-6498  
mixtgreens.com

**NOPA**  
560 Divisadero St.  
415-864-8643  
nopasf.com

**QUETZAL**  
1234 Polk St.  
415-673-4181  
coffeandcocoa.com

**ROOTS**  
466 Bush St.  
415-399-9807  
theorchardgarden  
hotel.com

**THE SLANTED DOOR**  
Ferry Building  
Marketplace  
415-861-8032  
slanteddoor.com

### SHOPPING

**NEW LEAF PAPER**  
116 New Montgomery St.  
888-989-5323  
newleafpaper.com

**PHARMACA INTEGRATIVE PHARMACY**  
925 Cole St.  
415-661-1216  
pharmaca.com

**WALDECK'S OFFICE SUPPLIES**  
500 Washington St.  
415-981-3381  
waldecks.com

**WHOLE FOODS**  
1765 California St.  
415-674-0500  
399 Fourth St.  
415-618-0066  
wholefoods.com

### SERVICES

**GREENER PRINTER**  
2800 Seventh St.  
Berkeley 510-898-0000  
greenerprinter.com

**TERRAPASS**  
877-879-8026  
terrapass.com

**VERDE GREEN CLEANING**  
415-561-9920  
verdeclean.com

“ I LIKE CHEETOS,  
but there is no way that a  
fluorescent-orange food  
can be good for you. ”

-CCA sustainable-design professor Sue Redding



**REDDING:** First, buy less. Really think about what you are buying, and question if you really need it. Waiting until products wear out “functionally,” rather than “stylistically,” will help you consume less. Second, use paper products sparingly. For example, use rags instead of paper towels, cloth napkins instead of paper ones, and inform companies that send you unwanted catalogs to stop sending them. Lastly, eat less red meat and dairy. The cattle and dairy industries are extremely hard on the environment. There are relatively few organic and natural cattle ranches in the US that don't cause damage to the environment. This also includes using less leather. When you can, choose recycled leather alternatives.

### What's your guilty, non-green pleasure?

**LOWRY:** I travel a lot, and it costs me a fortune in carbon offsets.  
**SIDER:** Surfing. While the surfing community has been beneficial for the broader environmental movement in general, surfboards themselves are incredibly harmful to the planet. Both conventional polyurethane-foam surfboards and, to a lesser extent, newer epoxy board designs, are full of VOCs [volatile organic compounds] and are nonbiodegradable. I probably have a dozen boards; multiply that by the burgeoning surfer population in the city, and we've got a real problem.  
**FREED:** Quilted triple-ply toilet paper and Diet Coke—but I always recycle the can!  
**SPARROW:** Airplane travel.  
**GRIFFIN-BLACK:** Popcorn at the movies and Margaret O'Leary cashmere sweaters.  
**MÜHLE:** I haven't yet traded in my old car for a hybrid. I love my old car! It's on my list, though, once I can afford to “buy up.”  
**EVANOW:** My cars, some of my cosmetics, leather and Illy coffee instead of organic/fair-trade brands.  
**REDDING:** Bleach. I love the way bleach gets clothes so white. But bleach and chlorine dioxide are very nasty chemicals and should

actually never be used. I also like Cheetos, but there's no way that a fluorescent-orange food can be good for you.

### Who are your environmental heroes or role models?

**GRIFFIN-BLACK:** [Earth Island Institute founder] David Brower, eco-philosopher Joanna Macy and the Dalai Lama.  
**MÜHLE:** I don't subscribe to heroes and role models. Everybody needs to pitch in.  
**SPARROW:** Wendell Berry. His essays on farming and the American economy are priceless and prophetic.

**REDDING:** Mandana MacPherson, the founder of Used Rubber; [industrial designer and author] Jay Baldwin, who was green when it wasn't cool; and Lynda Grose, who works with the Sustainable Cotton Project.  
**EVANOW:** The heroes are those helping green become mainstream, making people feel they can contribute by making small choices.  
**FREED:** They change daily, but I'd say Ray Anderson, who founded the carpet company Interface and has pledged to make it completely sustainable by 2020, and architect William McDonough, who wrote *Cradle to Cradle*.

### What's the best “green” news you've heard in the past year or so?

**LOWRY:** *The Stern Review* [a 700-page report from British economist Sir Nicholas Stern], because it puts not dealing with global warming into very real dollar terms, and spurred a lot of fence-sitters to act. Now retailers and consumers are starting to challenge the whole money-versus-environment fallacy.  
**FREED:** The year 2006 has proven to be the tipping point for all things green, from the Oscar for *An Inconvenient Truth* to Oprah devoting shows to green building to the best-selling *Vanity Fair* green issue.  
**SPARROW:** That Marin and Sonoma counties are considering a train as an alternate for the Highway 101 commute.  
**GRIFFIN-BLACK:** The passage in October 2005 of the California Safe Cosmetics Act, which requires companies to notify the state when they use certain toxic chemicals. We all have a right to know what we are putting on our bodies, just as we have a right to know what we are putting in them.  
**MÜHLE:** That *An Inconvenient Truth* won an Oscar. Now, hopefully, more people will see it and wake up to what's happening.  
**REDDING:** The best green news I have heard all year is that gas prices are reaching \$3 a gallon, because it means hybrid cars will soon be selling like hotcakes. x

“ SAN FRANCISCO  
HAS AMONG  
THE LEAST TREE  
COVERAGE of any  
American city, and  
still it removes 300  
tons of pollutants  
each year. ”

-Director of City Greening Daniel Sider

