

# RE People

**Who:** Dan Lewis & Jill Brandsborg  
**Where:** Guemes Island, Washington  
**When:** 2003 to present  
**What:** Solar-electric system  
**Why:** Simplicity & elegance

In 1996, Dan Lewis and Jill Brandsborg left professional careers in the Denver area to simplify their lives. Jill realized that the hectic pace of the city and her teaching career was taking its toll on her physically and emotionally. She frequently recalled her childhood dreams of living in a simple and purposeful way, and realized that her fast-paced life had left those aspirations behind.

Dan was likewise struggling with the pace and the consumption in their life. "Traditional America says you work hard, get a big paycheck, get a big house, and continue paying for it for much of your life," says Dan. "We left that because it wasn't really the quality of life we wanted. For us, real quality of life is not measured by money, but how we can live."

After traveling for a few years, they found 13 acres on Guemes Island, Washington, and built a 250-square-foot cabin, carefully designed to satisfy their needs while using less. Dan and Jill initially lived without electricity, using candles and kerosene lamps. These days, they use a small amount of propane to cook and heat water; they collect rainwater and compost all their organic materials on site. Both Dan and Jill bicycle and walk a lot, and they are moving toward growing some of their own food.

What impressed me most when I first met Dan and Jill continues to impress me today: They are committed to a *thoughtful* approach to their life and lifestyle. For several months after they moved into their cabin, they had few furnishings—a mattress in the loft, a simple kitchen countertop, and a few chairs. When I teased Dan about this, he said, "We want to make sure we get absolutely what we want." They were not in a hurry to get it done; it was more important to do it right.

Given their thoughtful consideration of every aspect of their lives, it is no surprise that they chose a small PV system for their minimal electrical needs, such as lighting, water pumping, and a computer. The 600-watt system typically meets their electricity needs ten months out of the year. When there's not enough energy in the winter, Dan and Jill either go into pre-electric mode (candles), or travel to visit friends and family. They do not own a generator.

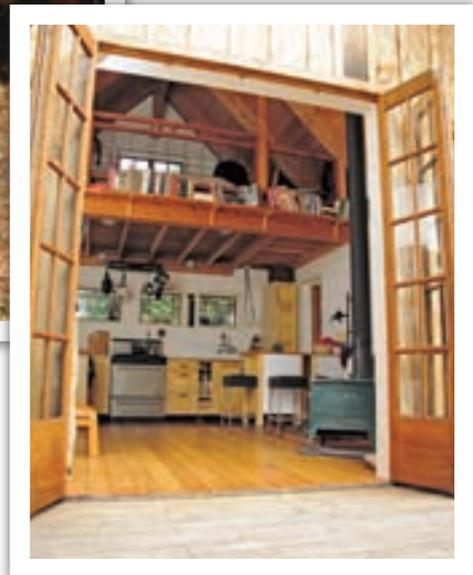
The couple's simple life reflects the land they live on, the community they live in, and their own hearts and minds. Their financial needs are minimal, with few bills, so they don't spend their lives working to pay for their lifestyle. Their example of living lightly on the land has inspired dozens of people who tour their basic but comfortable home.



Dan and Jill in front of their home.

Shawn Schreiner (3)

**Organization is the key to living large in small spaces.**



**Collecting rainwater is one of Dan and Jill's strategies for a more sustainable lifestyle.**



Jill says that when she visits "real" people in "real" houses with "real" jobs, she knows those lifestyles "don't fit this place." She says, "Slowing down has allowed us to enjoy the beauty in everyday, simple things. Since I allowed myself to do that, I don't want to go back."

—Ian Woofenden