

RE People



Who: Richard & Karen Perez

Where: Agate Flat, Oregon

When: 1970 to present

What: Off-grid solar energy systems

Why: Freedom



After living together on their off-grid property for the better part of four decades, *Home Power's* publishers, Richard and Karen Perez, sum up their homesteading experience: "Vehicle access—hard. Communications—hard. Electricity—easy."

Like a lot of adventure-seeking youth from their generation, Richard and Karen ended up in San Francisco in the late 1960s. Richard came west from Vermont, and Karen left her childhood home in the Saint Bernard Parish in New Orleans. When the San Francisco scene peaked in 1969, Richard and Karen moved north. They landed on Agate Flat in the Siskiyou Mountains of southernmost Oregon, where they picked up 40 acres of extremely remote land—six miles beyond the utility grid—for \$7,000 cash. Laughing, Richard says, "The early days were really heroic. We lived in a dome built with hand tools, hauled water in buckets from Skookum Creek, and dealt with kerosene lamps for lighting. Food and building materials were usually packed in on horseback."

Like many off-grid properties, the Perezes' homestead evolved over time. When asked what set him on his path to find a source for electricity, Richard responds, "The Grateful Dead. Period." An old lawn mower engine was rigged up to an alternator, charged a car battery, and just like that, they had electric lights at night and an endless stream of rock and roll.

They installed their first PV module in the early 1980s, and added more modules and new power electronics over the years as finances allowed. Currently, 4,600 watts of PV provide electricity, and six solar hot water collectors provide space and water heating for what Richard describes as "an all-around solar scene."



**Top: Richard and Karen Perezes' "all-around solar scene."
Bottom: Karen and Richard with their two dogs, Shasta and Maggie.**

Richard Perez with Home Power's first Macintosh computer, circa 1987.



Richard and Karen's early experience with solar electricity led them to install systems for their friends and neighbors, and their excitement about renewable technologies led to the creation of *Home Power* magazine in 1987. They saw an emerging technology that was unknown by the people who could really benefit from it, and a burgeoning market with no way to reach its potential customers. From their publishing platform, the Perezes' mission became to "change the way the world makes and uses electricity."

Having inspired a generation of RE users by example and via the magazine, Richard and Karen still have RE dreams of their own. Karen would "love to delete the 'yard bomb' (propane tank) and be able to solar cook all winter." And Richard fantasizes about having an all-electric 4WD pickup that could recharge from their RE system. Their long-term goal is to reduce their carbon footprint to zero.

Richard points out that "one of the toughest things about living remotely is finding a path to right livelihood. A lot of folks starve out and head back to the city." Karen chimes in and humbly voices her satisfaction with the life they lead: "What a joy to be able to help others on their own path to clean energy, doing something that you believe in, while helping the planet too."