

Living on the Sunny Side of Life By Robin Galen Kilrain

Self-proclaimed “sun guzzler” Dr. Rob Wilder wants to make one thing clear: A certain stereotype about an ecofriendly way of life should be abandoned. “I’ve never liked it when the environmental option is always portrayed as you give up something, you sacrifice.” Quality of life is important to Rob and his wife, Diana, and they don’t see any reason to compromise. From their solar-powered home and edible organic garden, to their electric sports car and businesses related to clean energy and green transportation, the Wilders are “doing green” while still living large.

Relying primarily on solar photovoltaic power created from rooftop and ground-mounted panels the couple installed when they bought their Olivenhain house in 2003, the family isn’t doing without. (A fact their kids, Sophia, 11, and Carson, 14,

can attest to: There’s plenty of juice for computers and Play-Stations.) The Wilders are just doing differently. Which makes perfect sense to these longtime environmentalists. As Rob says about their harnessing of sunshine, “It’s landing on our roof anyway. Anyone can do it. We just happen to take advantage of it.” Their solar system produces more power than they use during the day, so they draw on the surplus at night. Inside, use of breeze patterns and shade, LED bulbs, and heavy replacement doors, among other things, help regulate temperature and conserve energy.

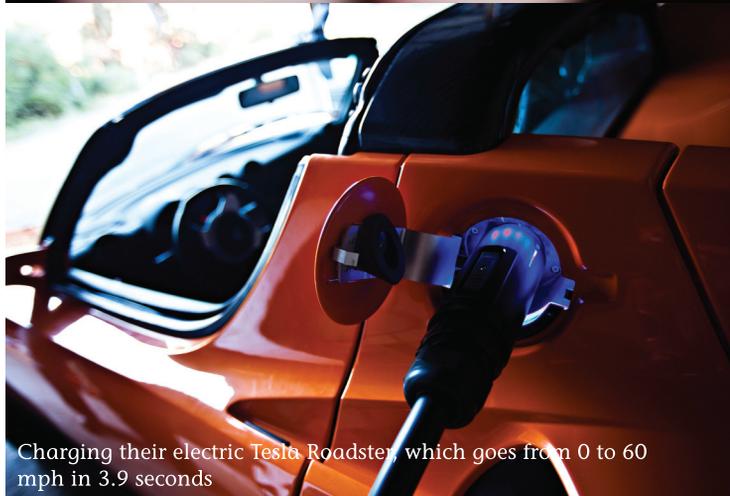
The couple are on the same page when it comes to creative environmental options for both indoors and outdoors—a vital key to making such a lifestyle succeed, in Rob’s opinion. Working toward the same goals, they balance their roles. Rob is “into the tinkering, the electrical, the technical stuff,” while Diana attends more to the food and gardening matters.

And tending to their food sources is no small potatoes, so to speak. A 45-by-44-foot section of the backyard is dedi-



Dry beans grown at the Wilders’ ecofriendly home

Photos: Dylan Mayer



Charging their electric Tesla Roadster, which goes from 0 to 60 mph in 3.9 seconds



Rob and Diana Wilder pose for a portrait by their solar panels.



The Wilders grow a majority of their food in their garden.

cated to an edible garden. The couple proudly point out a plethora of fruits and vegetables thriving within raised boxes. The “incredible bounty” of the all-organic harvest, which is nourished by rich fertilizer from an adjacent compost area and micro-irrigation, “just blows me away,” raves Diana.

Beyond the garden lies a small “free-range area,” home to redheaded hen Lucy and three cohorts. Never at risk for supplying a chicken dinner for the Wilders, they instead produce plenty of eggs for the family’s meals—and plenty of manure for composting.

A tour of the backyard includes taking note of the wide variety of fruit trees dotting a slope that rises behind the garden and the swimming pool (a dark bottom helps retain its solar-generated heat).

When the surfer in Rob calls for a different body of water, however, it’s down to the garage to unplug the fiery orange Tesla Roadster for a quick trip to the beach. Actually, “quick” is an understatement. The acceleration and speed this quiet car is capable of negates any golf cart-type preconceptions about electric vehicles. In fact, being able to zip from 0 to 60 mph in 3.9 seconds, without the hassle of gears to shift, has Rob pitying Porsche owners. Additional benefits include offering a possible 244 miles per charge and using the solar “fuel” the family

is already producing. It’s no wonder they’re planning to convert one of their “gasser” cars to electricity and are in the market for a new electric five-seater.

All aspects of the Wilders’ ecofriendly life appear to blend together seamlessly, as a lighthearted remark by Diana illustrates: “I’m the bean counter; I count the beans.” Sure enough, between reconciling financial spreadsheets for their company focused on green transportation and counting actual beans multiplying under her care, the shades of green blur. This seems to be fine with the Wilders, who are contentedly reaping the benefits of their multiple ecological endeavors. ☺

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