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# Tuning Up the House

Want to make your home as energy efficient as possible—but don't know how? See Joe Harberg

JOE HARBERG BECAME AN ENERGY-efficiency guru because he didn't know the first thing about energy efficiency. In 2003 he was constructing a new home in Dallas and wanted to work with his builder to make the place as environmentally friendly as possible. But neither Harberg nor his designer had any training in how to turn an ordinary house green, and they found few resources to help them. "It was so frustrating," says Harberg, 46, a Dallas-based entrepreneur.

Relying principally on the Internet, Harberg—who previously had worked as a marketing expert and real estate developer—did manage to build an energy-efficient home. He boasts that his electricity bills are regularly 50% less than those of similar homes in his neighborhood, and the entrepreneur in him saw an opportunity. Lots of people

worry about global warming, not to mention the soaring costs of powering a home, but they don't know what to do about it. Working with his brother-in-law Josh Stern, Harberg helped launch what would become Current Energy, in 2005, to provide the needed expertise. "We aspire to be the ones who put it all together for you," Harberg says.

Today Current Energy operates what is probably the first dedicated energy-efficiency retail store in the U.S., a hip space in Dallas' tony Highland Park where shoppers can buy ultraefficient air conditioners, tankless water heaters and even electric votive candles. But while the store itself is green cool—reminiscent of the Apple retail shops that Harberg helped roll out in his previous career—the real value in Current Energy isn't in its gadgets but in the services it offers. "It's

an art to figure out how to save money at home," Harberg says. "We do the work."

Homeowners who come to Current Energy can order an energy audit—a socket-to-faucet analysis of how to eliminate energy and water waste. After receiving the report, customers can follow as many of the recommendations as they wish, with Current Energy employ-

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—JOE HARBERG, PRINCIPAL PARTNER, CURRENT ENERGY

ees involved in the installation work—down to changing the lightbulbs. Joseph VanBlargan, a writer, secured an assessment for his Dallas home and estimates that the upgrades save him about 30% on his monthly energy bill. "I could have done it on my own, but there would have been bits and parts I would have missed," he says. Greenies who live outside Dallas will soon be able to get an energy assessment from [currentenergy.com](http://currentenergy.com), and the company will work with licensed auditors in your town to carry out the improvements.

What Current Energy does isn't as easy as it looks. Maximizing the efficiency in your home means more than just chucking your incandescent lightbulbs. You might improve your attic insulation to prevent the loss of heat in the winter, but go overboard, and you could end up choking on indoor air pollution. Just as a house is more than four walls and a door, energy efficiency should be holistic, with insulation, appliances, lighting and clean electricity all working together.

That's a message the tireless Harberg—who could probably power Texas Stadium if you plugged him into the grid—spreads with zeal. He hosts a weekly radio call-in show and was recently on the TV show *Good Morning Texas* touting the benefits of an indoor air-quality monitor. "You're saving people money and saving the earth at the same time," he says excitedly. As business plans go, that's an awfully good one.



### Joe's Green Shopping List

At its retail location and online, Current Energy sells a wide range of energy-efficiency gadgets:

- 1) **Digital PowerCost Monitor** provides real-time data on your energy consumption, \$185
- 2) **Magic Globe**, a solar-powered light, \$50
- 3) **Solio Solar Charger** is a way to power all those electronic devices with the sun, \$99
- 4) **Solar Backpack** lets you carry your laptop—and charge it for free, \$140
- 5) **Kill A Watt Electricity Meter** monitors the power use and cost of any appliance, \$40

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