

A family affair

BY JUSTIN STRANZ // JUSTIN.STRANZ@DR.OREGON.COM

Architect Yianni Doulis and interior designer Jessica Helgerson practice sustainable design in their Northwest Portland office, then continue their efforts at home

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— YIANNI DOULIS



The architect Yianni Doulis and interior designer Jessica Helgerson aren't too different from their Portland peers — they're fans of **funky, dense neighborhoods**, approach design with a **sustainable mindset** and arrived in the Rose City, as Helgerson puts it, **"YOUNG, FRESH AND POOR."**

But when 5 p.m. rolls around, Doulis and Helgerson don't get to walk away from their work.

A married couple, Doulis and Helgerson leave their Northwest Portland workspace and head to their Sunnyside home, where a green renovation is forever in progress.

An interest in sustainable design moved Doulis, a Portland native, and Helgerson, late of Santa Barbara, Calif., to embrace their respective professions. And their relationship, too.

"Green building was something I could think about all the time, and architecture is something I don't have to leave at the office," Doulis says. "And being married to a designer has led to a really organic approach to life."

The couple hasn't been working in Portland long. They met while working in Helgerson's hometown and only moved to Portland, at Doulis' behest, in August 2004, eventually setting up shop in a warehouse between Nob Hill and

the Pearl District where they operate separate practices.

There's a lot the couple likes about Portland — "Santa Barbara's got very restrictive design rules," Helgerson notes, and green building is "more of a given here." But they'd like to bring some of Santa Barbara's small-town feel north.

"Santa Barbara was a smaller community, but it's tighter-knit," Helgerson says. "We in the green community all forgot about our professional selves and became a group."

In Santa Barbara, Helgerson says, the couple was heavily involved in a collective called the Sustainability Project that comprised individuals with disparate interests and backgrounds but a similar commitment to green.

Portland, Helgerson says, has "a culture of support in the green building community," but nothing like the project she and Doulis gained so much from.

At their Northwest Portland office, a commitment to sustainable design is obvious — a massive table created from reclaimed driftwood anchors the lobby, and recycled glass is used to create a wall-to-wall mirror effect in the lavatory that renders the tiny bathroom spacious.

Renovating their Sunnyside home has given the couple a different take on what sustainability means. As designers, cost is more of a concern when they're playing with their own money, Helgerson and Doulis acknowledge. And they're now committed to environmentally friendly materials because their two young children live in the house. The process has been wholly educational, Helgerson says, and an opportunity she's grateful for as a sustainable designer and as a parent.

"The more I learn," she says, "the more I realize that nothing is clear."