Desert-Wise Living Tour

How can we dwell wisely in the desert? The drought has made water more precious. I invited friends to join us for the Desert-Wise Living Landscape Tour. Their morning trek is rewarded with banana pancakes and coffee, then we’re off to learn desert-wise water and energy strategies.

We first visit Mr. Jose, a cactus whisperer, who regales us with stories of his plants and local fauna. He has cultivated a desert garden of mostly native desert flora with cuttings and seedlings. He tailors to the plants’ water needs as conservatively as possible and sometimes treats them to old milk and cola!

The next stop is a straw bale house under construction with sloped butterfly roof. The landscape is lushly dotted with native vegetation, so the focus is on energy efficiency: solar panels, rainwater collection, straw bales for insulation, gray-water usage and an unusual power system. Kevin the owner/builder explains how the day’s solar energy would power electric motors to lift a boulder, and at night the stored inertia would cause motors to generate electricity. Also, the pipes on the eaves are designed with holes so the wind would play them like giant flutes.

After a cold drink stop, we drive through long stretches of unpaved roads north of Joshua Tree to the homestead of Bob & Judy Wold who are restoring a landscape using various permaculture ideas: downspout drains, gray-water usage, contour swales, berms and mulching. Their garden is thriving with native and drought tolerant plants. The former homestead is transformed to a beautiful art studio and their adjacent new home is built with solar panels, rain gutters and rainwater tank.

The tour was an enriching experience. It was inspiring to see the desert homes and gardens use creative ways towards desert-wise living. Water is life so use it wisely!