



Figure 1.3 Photograph of a southwestern home.

The definitions of “sustainable development” are too numerous to recount. The phrase itself is in danger of becoming another meaningless mantra. Design professionals need to recognize the intellectual and professional challenge presented to them in the need to find a workable balance with nature. This may be the most important time for the design professions since they have emerged. Architects have made important advances in designing green buildings, though the practices are hardly mainstream yet. There are excellent but too few examples of sustainable site development practices.

Sustainable site planning must include considerations of the impact of the site development on the local ecosystem, the global ecosystem, and the future. Principles of green site work encourage the designer to consider the nature of the materials and the flows of energy and materials not only to build the project but to maintain it over its useful life and to dismantle and dispose of it eventually if necessary (Table 1.6). More than just modifying the way storm water is handled, for example, the designer should consider the life cycle costs of the materials being used, the ultimate disposition of the site and the materials, and ways in which any negative impacts can be reduced or mitigated.

The longer the useful life of a building or a site, the longer the environment has to “amortize” the impacts. But designing a site with an extended life span requires the designer to consider future and possibly different uses and to incorporate that thinking into the design. The most sustainable development is