

Sunshine and light showers are forecast for the Oscar winning actor Cate Blanchett as she increasingly greens her lifestyle. She is installing solar panels to power her Sydney home and has cut her showers back to a maximum of four minutes to help save water in drought-stricken Australia. And that is only a beginning, for she is also greening her main place of work, is campaigning on solar power and climate change, and has committed to other changes in her life to save energy and water.

Blanchett — who sprang to fame in the title role of the film *Elisabeth* ten years ago — learned conservation when growing up in Melbourne in the 1970s from her grandmother who had lived through the Great Depression and, as a result, insisted in recycling and on letting nothing go to waste. She grew up to win an Oscar for her role in Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*, amid a host of other top awards, and was spurred into environmental activism by reading about her country's growing water crisis.

She says: "As I see it, there is no greater challenge we face as a species than dealing with climate change and its effects. I care about it because of my children. I want to safeguard their future. It is an inescapable problem, but also provides us with an opportunity to change for the better. To change the way we consume, the way we think, and the way we behave. By assuming responsibility, we protect and respect the generations behind us."

Together with her husband, playwright Andrew Upton, she has started by setting out to "greenovate" their home: powering it with solar energy, using natural air flows rather than air conditioning to cool it, and recycling grey water. The couple also plan to extend the improvements to the Sydney Theatre Company, where they are joint artistic directors, with the aim of running off-grid for a whole season.

"I really love a refreshing shower," she says, but has installed a timer to stop them after four minutes. Indeed she tries to make them even shorter. "I actually have little races with myself thinking 'I'm not washing my hair, so I only need to have a two-minute shower'. I'm just trying to do my bit. I do live in a desert called Australia, you know."

Blanchett has also committed to setting her washing machine to wash her clothes in cold water, to drive 20 kilometres less each week, and to avoid one domestic flight a year. Are those transport commitments big enough? "Look" she has said: "I live in the modern world as much as anyone else. I use a car and I have been flying far more than I am comfortable with. So it's been really important for me to offset my flights, which I do."

She also campaigns on climate change, visiting a drought-stricken Australian lake to call attention to the crisis, going on a march with her children and promoting last year's Earth Hour which encouraged people to turn off all lights for sixty minutes to kick-start a campaign to cut Sydney's greenhouse gas emissions.

Earlier this year Blanchett became a primary investor in a Californian start-up company that aims to make it easy to install solar. By using satellite imaging it calculates the dimensions of a customer's roof, selects the right panels and installs them. And she is patron of SolarAid, a charity that trains rural communities in Africa to build solar radios, lanterns, mobile phones and other devices and then helps them set up small businesses to sell them.

CATE BLANCHETT



NETT