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CRUISING ALASKA
DESIGNING A GREEN HOME
MPR'S KERRI MILLER
LOUNGING AT BRADSTREET



LIVING + DESIGN



TCLF | MARCH 2009

Cambridge photograph courtesy of American Standard

GREEN, VERSION 4.0

AN UPGRADE ON SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

By Ivy Gracie

The green movement was gaining mainstream momentum three years ago; Now it's at Mach 1. No longer just about recycling or conserving energy, going green is about creating a beautiful, healthy living environment with safe, stylish materials. Sustainable items are challenging the status quo: The old oatmeal and burlap palette has blossomed into a full spectrum of lush colors, and what was once rough-hewn has become well heeled. With seemingly limitless options, there's no reason not to get a little greener. Three green innovators share some up-to-the-minute ideas on how to do it.



EcoTop countertops are made from a blend of FSC certified post-consumer recycled paper and bamboo fiber and are available in a wide selection of colors.

Photograph courtesy of Klip BioTechnologies

CATCH SOME AIR

Air quality has taken the lead role in the green movement — and with good reason. Almost every home contains a variety of VOCs (volatile organic compounds) that off-gas into the air. VOCs are everywhere, from paint and wood stains to furniture and fabrics, from carpeting and cabinetry to the cleaning supplies under the sink. And some may have short- and long-term adverse health effects. But stains and paints are available in gentle, water-based formulas and fabric, furniture and carpeting manufacturers are producing products without toxin-emitting fabric guards. Clean, safe, attractive alternatives can offer a breath of fresh air. Literally.



The Alen Paralda HEPA air purifier removes harmful bacteria and airborne contaminants.

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Photograph courtesy of Joel Puliaiti for Vetrazzo ©2/2/08

JOIN THE COUNTER-EVOLUTION

Granite is undeniably eye-catching but it's as ubiquitous as avocado appliances in the '70s. And we all know what happened to them.

Despite its natural origins, the popular stone may not be as green as it appears. Granite must be sealed regularly to keep it from staining and absorbing harmful bacteria, and VOCs are found in most sealants. Additionally, there have been allegations that certain types of granite contain radon and emit unhealthy levels of radiation. But alternative countertop options are safe, sophisticated and can set a home apart from the masses.

Recycled glass is striking and strong, emulating granite in look and feel; bamboo is a pleasant proxy for standard hardwood countertops. And recycled paper countertops made from postconsumer paper waste are durable and good-looking. "There's a product called EcoTop that's made with condensed recycled paper and mixed with bamboo," says Josh Foss, LEED AP and principal of Thrive, a Minneapolis-based design and consulting firm focused on sustainability. "You seal it with a wax that you could pour on your cereal — it's that natural."

Soapstone is another appealing choice. "It's been around for millions of years," says Rosemary Merrill, lead designer and president of Casa Verde, a Minneapolis-based kitchen and bath showroom that promotes incorporating eco-luxe materials in home design. "Instead of sealing it, you oil it — so you don't use toxic chemicals."

ABOVE: Vetrazzo recycled glass countertop

Cambria is simultaneously green and great-looking. "Cambria begins as pure crushed quartz and is compacted, baked and polished to become the hard surface we see in countertops, fireplace surrounds, flooring and bath and tub surrounds," says Peter Martin, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Minnesota-based Cambria. "It's 93% quartz and 7% polymer resin that holds it together." And because quartz is non-porous and non-absorbent, it doesn't need to be sealed.



Photograph courtesy of Casa Verde Design

RIGHT: Media cabinet is made of walnut, which is an FSC certified wood.

CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

Innovative use of unexpected materials is one of the cornerstones of the green movement — it's also a touchstone of good design. And when the two come together, a home can become an expression of individuality.

Reclaimed items, like the wood slab Merrill used to design a one-of-a-kind dining table, bring unique character into a home. Part of the table's appeal is its history. "It was from a 150-year-old cabin in Hutchison owned by a Finnish immigrant," Merrill says. But despite its humble beginnings, the wood's current incarnation is elegant enough for almost any décor.

Recycling resuscitates products that have passed their prime. "For every product out there, there's an alternative with recycled content," says Foss. "From carpeting made from recycled soda bottles to recycled upholsteries for fabrics."

Along with recycled fabrics, eco-friendly textiles made from natural alpaca, cotton, linen, hemp and bamboo are gaining popularity as upholstery, draperies and accents. Available in an array of rich colors, patterns and textures, options are available for every taste.



Photograph courtesy of Duro Design Flooring, Inc.

INVEST WISELY

Understanding where a product comes from and how it's produced can help drive informed, intelligent decisions that impact not only the home but the planet itself.

Certifications can help illuminate environmentally friendly practices. FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification indicates that eucalyptus, bamboo, cork and even standard wood products have been grown and harvested in an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable way. And Greenguard certification indicates that a product has been tested to ensure that its emissions meet acceptable indoor air-quality guidelines and standards.

Research on corporate production methods can tip the scales in one direction or another. The knowledge that Cambria recycles all the water used to polish its products because it's cost effective and environmentally sound might make the winning difference in a contest between Cambria and another countertop surface. Perhaps knowing that a piece of furniture comes from wood harvested from an endangered rainforest might halt the purchasing process. Ultimately, consumer dollars support corporate practices, and production methods have an impact on the environment.

THINK LONG TERM

Choosing pieces and materials that will outlast trends and fads isn't something new — it's a time-honored fashion tradition. And it works in the home. "If something is well designed it's going to be long-lasting," says Merrill. "That's a good way to think as a consumer, because you'll buy things that last a long time. Long-lasting is sustainable." ☪



Photograph courtesy of Chairlift, Q Collection

Photograph courtesy of Joshua Foss, Thrive Design Studio

TOP: Horizontal-grain bamboo flooring in ebony

ABOVE: Q Collection Canopy Fabric

LEFT: Recycled carpeting in the Thrive Design Studio