



HOME GREEN HOME

Protect your family by eliminating toxins for a cleaner, healthier living space. **By R. B. Stuart**

As global changes affecting our environment call out for us to take action, defending Mother Earth isn't simply about hybrid cars, sustainable farming, organic foods, and eco-friendly packaging. Green consciousness is expanding into our homes, so if the new year has prompted a resolution for greener living, then your home is a great place to start. There's no better time to consider making healthy changes around the house, as the marketplace is currently surging with environmentally responsible new products. For instance, when insulating walls, no longer are we limited to just one option of toxic fiberglass insulation; new choices include recycled 100-percent cotton denim. Yes, your home can now wear jeans. In fact, the annual U.S. market in green building products and services has grown from more than \$7 billion in 2005 to nearly \$12 billion in 2007.

WHAT IS GREEN DESIGN?

"Sustainable design takes into consideration the health of people and

the environment. It's complicated, but it's a synergy of three concepts: health, energy efficiency, and material resources," explains Maggie Wood, founder and principal of Maggie Wood Design in Jameport. Her passion for elegant design and commitment to sustainable principles has led her to focus solely on green design. "As we face pollutants in our environment, we are now able to select green materials for our home," she says.

To begin, one needs a "home audit," which focuses on different areas of living. There's an "energy audit" that identifies places in your home you need to address regarding energy savings, whether it's adding more insulation or weather stripping, or simple solutions such as replacing your thermostat. In addition, an "indoor air analysis" is recommended to specifically search for mold spores. You can purchase a professional test kit, which costs upwards of \$1,000, and do it yourself by taking air samples. Or, consider hiring a Green Home Audit Consultant to address the indoor air, water quality, furnishings, furniture, beddings, and paints in your home. "It is a holistic



Far left: For living areas, consider organic upholstered furniture, a reclaimed wood dining table, a recycled-frame mirror, no-VOC paints, and an organic wool rug. Above, left to right: Going green doesn't mean compromising high style; a large variety of organic cotton velvet, hemp fabrics, and silk are becoming more widely available. Houseplants clean the air, removing formaldehyde and other toxins. Consider refinishing antique dining tables and chairs with zero-VOC wood finish, and accessorizing with organic flowers, low-energy lighting, and untreated wool rugs.

approach to living,” says Wood, who is a LEED Accredited Professional and member of the U.S. Green Building Council.

EASY WAYS TO ELIMINATE TOXINS

Eliminating exposure to toxins in your home is the most important aspect to be addressed when creating a green living environment. This begins with an analysis, and then addressing the most detrimental toxins first. “The longer something has been in your home, the less likely it is emitting chemicals into the air,” says Wood. Without feeling you have to dispose of or replace everything all at once, it can be done in stages. This is something you can plan ahead for, taking six months to a year or more depending on your budget.

“Splurging on an organic mattress would be a great place to start, since you spend so much of your time in bed,” says Wood, who has been at the forefront of the green design movement for several years. It can be expensive—an organic mattress may cost around \$2,000—though it should last for 30 years. “People will spend at least this

much on a vacation—think of it as a green vacation for your home,” Wood elaborates.

Installing a water-purification system, which should run \$200 to \$300, is another initial change that will provide an immediate healthful benefit for you and your family. Wood also suggests replacing conventional lightbulbs with CFLs (compact fluorescent lightbulbs), repainting walls with no-VOC (volatile organic compound) finishes, replacing heavy drapes with cotton curtains or non-vinyl blinds, and reupholstering furniture, substituting down for foam. Additionally, Wood recommends eliminating air fresheners and artificially scented candles, opting for beeswax candles with a soy base, “because the beeswax purifies the air.” Other easy fixes include:

- Replacing teflon pans with stainless steel.
- Disposing of chemical-based personal-care products (such as baby powder, makeup, soap, shampoo, etc.) and household cleaning products and repurchasing items made only from natural, biodegradable ingredients.
- Changing your vinyl shower curtain to cotton, nylon, hemp, or linen, since vinyl releases chemicals into the air that you routinely inhale when taking a hot shower.
- Eliminating plastic containers for food as well as water bottles.
- Replacing synthetic carpet and rugs (which are highly treated with anti-stain chemicals and formaldehyde) with organic wool rugs.
- If repainting your walls, look for paints without VOCs, as conventional paints and stains contain a toxic polyurethane sealer. This is especially important for pregnant women and households with infants or young children.
- Looking for down-filled upholstered furnishings, and non-



Green Real Estate

If you're looking to buy a new home and interested in green homes, then a Green Real Estate Broker is the route to go. **Paul McGinniss**, an advocate of green and sustainable real-estate development, is a Certified Green EcoBroker and partner at the New York Real Estate Group, focusing on real estate in New York City, Long Island, and the Hudson Valley-Catskills region.

Green Brokering is a new concept, and applies to both residential and commercial real estate. "It begins with a green consciousness that can be brought to any field. A Green Real Estate Broker is aware of the issues and impact on the environment," says McGinniss, who teaches a class called "Green Home Building and Renovation," at SUNY Ulster.

If you're seeking a Green Broker, a company called **EcoBroker**, based in Colorado, lists about a dozen brokers in N.Y. State, though their criteria are stringent, with their own certification. **The U.S. Green Building Council** (USGBC) is an incredible nonprofit resource for architects, designers, engineers, general

contractors, subcontractors, and others committed to expanding sustainable building practices. USGBC's mission is to transform the way buildings and communities are designed, built, and operated, enabling an environmentally and socially responsible, healthy, and prosperous environment that improves quality of life. Another excellent resource is **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design** (LEED), which USGBC developed as a voluntary, consensus-based national rating system. Both have accredited certifications that you should ask for when researching a green professional.

McGinniss, who's becoming LEED accredited, encourages asking questions of your broker. "Find out how familiar they are with green professionals," he suggests. And ask if they are familiar with specific rebates and subsidies, energy-efficient mortgages, **NYSERDA** (NYS Energy Research Development Authority), the **Energy Star** program, and the **Home Energy Rating System** (HERS). "Don't wait for your broker, architect, or builder to tell you what you want to know. Get motivated, be proactive, be educated, and inform yourself," advises McGinniss, a USGBC member.

He highly recommends having a professional "home audit" (which should run \$400 to \$800) before purchasing a home, explaining there is a reimbursement for this fee, and you will qualify for other rebates if you make any home improvements recommended by a HERS Rater. Contact the **Residential Energy Services Network** (RESNET) for assistance in locating a certified Rater in your area.

Although there isn't much data available on Green Brokers, McGinniss claims there shouldn't be any additional costs when choosing a green professional. "This green revolution we're going through is as significant as the combined advancement in science, technology, and medicine that our society has undergone in the last century," he concludes.

treated fabrics (for instance, IKEA uses foam without toxic flame-retardants, Scotch Guard, or Stain Master chemicals for their furniture and mattresses).

- Using paper-backed wallcovering instead of vinyl wallpaper.
- Washing new bed linens and towels several times before use, since new, unwashed cotton is most often treated with conventional formaldehyde. Preferably, choose organic cotton sheets where the cotton is grown pesticide-free and minimally processed.

RESPONSIBLE RENOVATING

If you need renovations to your home, you can use your own designer or architect, but request they use eco-friendly alternatives to toxic materials. "They don't need to know about green building, but they need to be open to it, and you should bring on a green consultant with expert qualifications of more than a few years," Wood advises. She recommends the unbiased online publication *Green Home Guide* for consultant listings, as well as word-of-mouth referrals.

Green Design and Building Sources

Maggie Wood Design, LLC

Design and consulting firm in Jamesport, NY, focused exclusively on green residential and commercial design. (631) 722-4547, maggiewood.com

Residential Energy Services Network

A nonprofit organization setting standards for building energy-efficiency rating systems; provides consumer information on finding a certified rater and mortgage. natesnet.org

GreenHomeGuide

Lists green designers; provides expert advice on creating a healthy home environment. greenhomeguide.com

U.S. Green Building Council

Promotes environmentally responsible building practices. usgbc.org

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

Encourages global adoption of sustainable green building and development practices through the creation and implementation of universally understood and accepted tools and performance criteria. usgbc.org/LEED

Low Impact Living

Products and services for the home and garden. lowimpactliving.com

GREEN REAL ESTATE BROKERS

Paul McGinniss, New York Real Estate Group, New York City and Accord, NY. (845) 616-5665, newyorkrealestategroup.com, Paul@NewYorkRealEstateGroup.com

Marilyn Urso, LI Village Realty, Syosset, NY. (516) 921-0220, murso@li-villagerealty.com

EcoBroker (800) 706-4321, ecobroker.com

GREEN BUILDING SUPPLIES

House About Saving A Planet

Eco modern modular homes. asaphouse.com

Green Build 365

Portal for green building education. greenbuild365.org

GrassRoots Environmental Education

Nonprofit organization based in Port Washington, NY, educating the public about environmental toxins. grassrootsinfo.org

BettenCourt Green Building Supply Co.

Ecologically responsible building supplies; Brooklyn, NY. (718) 218-6737, bettencourtwood.com

Bonded Logic UltraTouch Denim Insulation

Natural fiber insulation products. bondedlogic.com

Co-op America

Listing of green businesses. coopamerica.org

Lifekind Organic Mattress & Bedding Company

Organic bedding. lifekind.com

IKEA Home

Nontoxic furniture and mattresses. ikea.com/us/en

General Ecology

Water purification systems. generalecology.com

YOLO Colorhouse

No-VOC paints. yolocolorhouse.com

AFM Safecoat

Non-toxic paints, primers, finishers, carpet cleaners. afmsafecoat.com

American Clay

Natural paints, stucco, finishes. americanclay.com

BioShield Natural Paints

Natural paints and finishes. bioshieldpaint.com

SMALL STEPS COUNT

Don't be overwhelmed," Wood points out. "You should know it's simple enough to do it from room to room. Go through each room systematically and ask yourself three questions: What can I get rid of today and replace? What can I re-purpose and keep by repainting or reupholstering? What do I need to buy new (large items such as furnishings, mattresses, or flooring, as well as household supplies)?"

The main benefit of green living is you'll feel better. "It's like a breath of fresh air," Wood remarks. "When they green their home, people usually want to include other aspects of their life like their

diet. It's a trickle-down effect. People may live on a little bit less when they're going green—but in a good way. Especially with children . . . you're definitely protecting their health down the road." On a larger scale, creating a less toxic living space will benefit the environment at large. 🌱

R. B. Stuart is a writer and founding executive director of OperationPurpleHeart.blogspot.com, a Website tracking soldiers returning from Iraq with cancer.

+ Comment on this story at canvasli.com