



Renew & Refresh

Eco-friendly, recycled products heat up the kitchen

By Matthew Marin

September 01, 2008 - Fueled by the demand from eco-conscious consumers, green products made from renewable and recycled materials are becoming increasingly popular in luxury kitchens. "People who are buying high-end products still want to be green and incorporate earth-friendly products into their designs," noted **Sattie Clark**, cofounder of Eleek, a sustainable manufacturer of sinks, lighting and surfaces. "We want to make sure that the products we are offering are part of the big-picture solution."

Green, however, does not mean unattractive. Today's designers have access to a wide variety of environmentally friendly alternatives for countertops, backsplashes, cabinetry and flooring that allow them to create beautiful kitchens while saving the planet too. And to avoid the depletion of natural resources, more manufacturers are taking steps to ensure that these products are readily available. "The more the merrier," Clark said. "There is room for all when it comes to sustainability."

SALVAGING SCRAPS

One of the hottest green trends in kitchen design is the use of recycled glass, especially in tile format. Available in a wide variety of colors and sizes for creating backsplashes, cabinet inserts and even room dividers, glass tiles provide seemingly endless design possibilities and do not emit VOCs that can impair indoor air quality. According to **Maggie Wood, LEED AP, Allied ASID**, principal of Maggie Wood Design LLC, designers should choose glass tiles made with at least 30- to 40-percent post-consumer materials, as "five to 10 percent is just a drop in the bucket."

For countertops, crushed, recycled glass terrazzo can make an impact in any space and comes in an array of colors. In addition, it's easy to maintain, durable and odorless.

"New green products for countertop considerations are not only beautiful but functional," said **Carolyn Robbins**, owner of Carolyn Robbins Site Design. Some also incorporate scrap materials that may seem, at first glance, counterintuitive. For example, compressed recycled paperboard, often mistaken for being fragile, is in fact very durable, as well as water-resistant, said Robbins, and offers a viable option for countertops.

For other kitchen components, manufacturers such as Eleek are recycling aluminum scraps from local suppliers into durable kitchen sinks and decorative hardware.

SAVING NATURAL RESOURCES

The market also abounds with alternatives to old-growth timber for kitchen flooring and cabinetry. Many of these employ sustainably harvested wood or salvaged materials, as well as ultra-low-VOC and water-based adhesives and finishes. Popular choices for cabinets include those made of wheat board, straw board and even formaldehyde-free plywood, while Marmoleum and biodegradable linoleum are ideal for floors. If wood is desired, FSC-certified planks are not only environmentally friendly, but easy to assemble.

With prices dropping, green products are coming on strong. Advocates agree that designers should play a key role in educating the public about lessening their environmental impact and helping them to navigate the increasingly crowded market. "Ten years from now, all products in kitchen and bath showrooms will have a green component," Wood said. "Companies can not afford not to meet the demands of the public."