

Bring Long Island Home

by Betsy Davidson, LI Pulse Magazine
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JUST WHAT DOES “THINK GREEN” MEAN? I THINK most people will agree that “green” means “ecoconscious.” It is considered “green” to recycle and plant trees, to keep your thermostat set at 68°, to purchase energy-efficient, longer lasting light bulbs and unbleached paper towels. I could go on and on. We are in the midst of a global environmental crisis due to the depletion of natural resources, damage to worldwide ecosystems and loss of biodiversity. Out of this growing crisis has evolved the Green design train of thought.

Green design (also referred to as “sustainable design” or “eco-design”) is a catchall phrase that defines a growing trend within the fields of interior design, industrial design, architecture and landscape architecture. Green design is design that goes beyond being energy efficient and attractive. It embraces comfort, health, well-being, resource efficiency and environmental protection. Green design takes into consideration the effects that buildings (our homes and office places) have on people and the environment. The essential aim of green design is to produce places, products and services in a way that reduces the use of non-renewable resources, minimizes environmental impact, and helps people relate with their natural environment. Before long, it will be the standard by which all other design will be measured. To put it simply, good green design reduces waste of both energy and materials.

The goal here is to throw some green ideas out there in hopes of promoting design and lifestyle changes that benefit our environment...or at least don't harm it as much.

Energy Efficiency For many years now, we have been hearing about replacing our old incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs, which will reduce the monthly electric bill by 5%. I have always been repelled by the ugly glow of lower-end fluorescent bulbs. Fortunately, there are now higher-end fluorescent bulbs on the market, which will cast a pure white or a buttery glow, yet still reduce electricity consumption. These bulbs can be screwed in, just like incandescent bulbs, and they last 10 times longer. Or try halogen light bulbs— they produce more light and use less electricity. They cost more, but on the flip side, each halogen bulb lasts about 2-3 years.

Consider a new low-flow toilet. Manufacturers have come up with new models that deliver big flush power using far less water (trims an average of about \$90 from annual water bills). How about replacing old showerheads and faucets with low water use fixtures? Consider this: There are even ways to recycle “gray water” or waste water from sources such as dishwashers or washing machines that can be treated and used to flush toilets, water lawns and wash cars. Rainwater collectors can be used for similar purposes.

As for appliances, keep in mind when purchasing new refrigerators, air conditioners, furnaces and the like that each new appliance has two “price tags” (what you pay to take

it home and what you pay for the water and energy it uses). Look for appliances that have earned the “Energy Star.” Energy Star is a joint program of the US Environmental Protection Agency and the US Department of Energy. There are over 50 categories of products—from washing machines to programmable thermostats to televisions—that are eligible for the Energy Star rating. Visit their website www.energystar.gov for more information.

Paints If repainting a room in your home is on the agenda this spring and the fumes from latex-based paints make you feel a bit woozy, investigate paint products that are low in volatile organic compounds, or VOCs. Recent improvements in quality and designer colors are making these water-based paints comparative to standard paints, plus they benefit your health as well as the health of the planet. Both Sherwin Williams and Benjamin Moore now manufacture low VOC paints.

Flooring There is a wealth of options available to the homeowner with regards to flooring and floor coverings. Bamboo is one of the most abundant renewable resources. It grows rapidly and freely (my backyard can attest to this), and is amazingly durable and strong. Hard woods harvested by growers that have been certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) are another option. The FSC, by means of strict environmental and socio-economic standards, promotes healthy forestry practices worldwide. Another responsible source for quality hardwoods is reclaiming or salvaging wood from buildings that have been demolished or remodeled. Very often these woods have a luster and patina that is rarely found in recently harvested wood. Other flooring options to consider are linoleum, cork, concrete, rubber (think of all those discarded tires) and ceramic tile.

As far as floor coverings go, the environmental options are just as vast. A visit to any carpeting store will reveal some rather interesting natural floor coverings in jute, hemp, sisal, seagrass, wool and cotton.

Textiles Drapes, curtains, bed coverings, slipcovers and so on can be both attractive and eco-friendly. Organic cotton is grown without chemical pesticides or fertilizers. Other textile options include wool, linen, hemp, ramie and jute—all of which are incredibly strong and durable. For those craving a more luxurious look, it might be worth looking into nonviolent silk. Traditionally, when silk is processed, the moth cocoons are steamed or boiled open to reveal the precious filament inside. Nonviolent silk processing allows the moths to emerge from their cocoons unharmed and then the cocoons are processed. This silk tends to be a bit stronger, not as lustrous as cultivated silk and quite a bit kinder to the moths. The Garnet Hill catalog (www.garnethill.com) is a wonderful source for natural fiber products for the home (clothing, too).

Furniture There is a vast selection of furniture made today using bamboo and responsibly harvested hardwoods. An often-overlooked eco-friendly way to furniture shop is to go antiquing or yard sailing (visit the archives at www.lipulse.com, July 2006). Why create new furniture when there are so many wonderful tables and chairs available on the antiques market? Antiques possess a certain warmth and patina that cannot be duplicated today.

Designers There are a number of interior designers passionate about thinking green including Maggie Wood of Maggie Wood Design, LLC, in Jamesport. Maggie runs a design and consulting firm focused exclusively on green residential and commercial design. Her passion for elegant design and commitment to sustainable principles is her trademark. Explore her website at www.maggiewood.com for more information.

This March, instead of simply wearing green, I suggest that we all dig down deep and find the tree hugger within: Think Green!