



Staten Island Advance

IT'S EASY BEING GREEN

An expanding market for eco-friendly furnishings is making it easier for homeowners to do their bit for Planet Earth

Sunday, September 16, 2007

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Everywhere you look these days, the words "eco-chic," "organic" and "green" scream out at you. The environment-friendly movement has hit the big time, appearing at the Oscars, on clothing by major designers and at the local supermarket.

And now, it's taking over the home.

According to Jennifer Roberts, author of "Good Green Homes" (Gibbs Smith), in the past three to five years, "going green" has become much more than just a passing fad.

"Five years ago, I might have said 'green is a trend,'" said Ms. Roberts, a San Francisco, Calif., resident. "But now I feel there is a major change in people's consciousness in the United States and green is here to stay."

Ms. Roberts observes that the market for eco-friendly furnishings is becoming more competitive: More green products are readily available to the consumer and prices are coming down. But with that, she charges, comes "green washing" -- companies making exaggerated claims about their products' environmental attributes.

The author suggests looking for green seals of approval, such as that of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) on wood, and Energy Star on electrical devices.

While green furnishings usually are made just as well as others, her advice to consumers is to buy higher-quality items. Even though they may cost more up front, they probably won't end up in the trash in a few years. If money's an object, she suggests shopping at flea markets to see what you can reuse.

"Every choice you make, presents you with a choice to damage the environment or do good for the environment," Ms. Roberts said.

REUSE FURNISHINGS

Interior designer Maggie Wood believes in reusing and fixing up furnishings you already own as a way to reduce waste and recycle materials. But if you are in the market for new decor, Ms. Wood, creative director of Jamesport, N.Y.-based Maggie Wood Design, advises first buying for the spaces you use most and remain on green alert: If you're a couch potato, look for a sofa that isn't treated with flame-retardant or stain-resistant chemicals.

If you need new carpeting, choose small area rugs made with natural fibers like wool, jute or sisal. Time to paint? Use zero or low VOC (volatile organic compound) paints, available from top manufacturers like Sherwin Williams and Benjamin Moore.

In addition to FSC-certified wood for flooring, Ms. Woods suggests considering cork, which is all-natural and very durable. Or, how about "marmoleum," a linoleum flooring made from natural materials that don't contain VOCs or other toxic chemicals.

Ms. Roberts points out that bamboo also works for flooring and furniture, explaining that it's a rapidly renewable resource that grows quickly, regenerates itself and is not produced using a lot of pesticides.

"Bamboo has kind of been the green darling," she notes.

FUTURE-FRIENDLY

At 3r Living in Brooklyn, former Todt Hill resident Samantha Delman-Caserta sells an array of earth-friendly home decor items, including some made from bamboo. "These are future-friendly products," she said.

People of all ages visit her shop, she said, from 20- and 30-somethings looking for great style while keen to consider global needs, to those in their 60s, who have watched environmental issues mount through the years.

Among 3r Living's biggest sellers are organic cotton sheets and towels, available in different colors and made with non-toxic and herbal dyes. Also popular are bamboo cutting boards, sushi plates, chopsticks and bowls that are formaldehyde free and minus toxic coatings, Ms. Delman-Caserta said.

Additionally, the store features Fire and Light brand recycled glass dishes, martini glasses and soap dishes, among other recycled items. Mad Mats, colorful indoor/outdoor rugs made of recycled plastic, also have been a hit, she said.

"In the past, the environmental movement got a bad rap for being beige, boring, dull or hippie," Ms. Delman-Caserta said. "I think it's having a re-emergence with a different twist."

This is something Jill Salisbury understands. The founder and chief designer of el: Environmental Language, creates furniture that is both fashionable and environmentally sustainable. Her stylish designs are traditional and classic, able to be mixed with both antique and modern decor.

The Chicago-based company produces heirloom-quality products that are meant to be passed down through generations. They practice the cradle-to-cradle philosophy, utilizing recyclable materials that can be made into something else, never having to see a landfill.

"They're not something that will never biodegrade or leech toxic chemicals," explained Ms. Salisbury, whose furnishings are only sold to the trade.

Some popular products in the line include the Origami chaise, featuring a frame made of stainless steel, walnut, rift-cut oak or cherry wood and finished with a natural lacquer, and a Takira table, crafted of walnut with a tagua nut inlay. The company also produces ottomans and stools, dining tables, buffets and hutches, sofas and sleepers using sustainably harvested wood.

HIP TO BE SQUARE

"I think, in general, people are understanding that they can enjoy a hip lifestyle without doing a lot of damage to the planet," said Valerie Reddemann, founder and president of Greenfeet, based in Chico, Calif.

To go green, Ms. Reddemann suggests looking for multi-functional products; i.e., a bowl that can be used for serving food and as a part of your home's decor. Or kitchen tools that have more than one function. "Less is more," she said.

Ms. Reddemann said her customers tend to want products made from natural materials (as opposed to plastic), which lend a warmth to the home. Her online store sells organic sheets, hemp beanbag chairs, bamboo bowls and baskets and natural cotton robes, among other eco-friendly products.

"When you're surrounded by natural and beautiful things," she said, "it brings a whole new element to your home."

To shop for green products online, visit www.3rliving.com or www.greenfeet.com. Andrea Boyarsky is a features reporter for the Advance. She may be reached at boyarsky@siadvance.com.

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