



## ***The Kitchen & Bath Insider***<sup>®</sup>

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### **Green Design is Here to Stay**

Although, it's difficult to convince me that global warming is a threat these days, (as the temperature struggles to reach 50 degrees in the middle of May), scientists are still predicting that we're in a lot of trouble. (See: [www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/crosscutting/climate.html](http://www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/crosscutting/climate.html)). And, who's to blame for this horrible dilemma? You and me. Now I know that we didn't mean to contribute to the problem, (at least I didn't), but there are ways for us to help reverse our downward spiral into oblivion.

"Green Design", the latest catch phrase in the remodeling business, is not just a lot of hot air, (which, by the way, can hurt the ozone layer). Using rapidly renewable resources and recycling used materials is the way to go today. Naturally, all the experts have different views on what is an acceptable "green" product, and the consumer will have to apply some common sense when selecting the materials for a project.

The term Green Design is not just limited to the materials in a project. It's a multifaceted concept that encompasses such diverse topics that include what types of appliances are installed, (and how efficient they are), how the cabinet accessories encourage recycling and which paints have the lowest VOCs (volatile organic compounds). For example, including a 4-bin recycling center in one of the cabinets falls under the auspices of Green Design.

Living in America, it's only natural that some companies are taking advantage of this new trend and charging more for so-called green materials. Seeing this as an opportunity to make higher profits, they are offering relabeled products, (that may or may not be earth friendly to begin with), as "new and improved". This is more like Greed Design than Green Design, and only an educated consumer will be able to discern the difference. Most manufacturers, however, are dedicated to bringing to the market new materials and appliances that will last longer, emit lower toxins and be made from rapidly renewable sources.

While shopping for cabinets, countertops, appliances, floors and even insulation, you should ask about their impact on the environment. Consider eco-friendly flooring, manufactured from bamboo or cork. These grasses and trees mature in half the time of hardwoods and so can be quickly renewed. Think about Energy-Star appliances, windows, and doors. These appliances use 10 to 50% less energy and water than standard models and insulated windows and doors can save hundreds of dollars in heating costs.

If you're remodeling your kitchen or bathroom, consider refacing the existing cabinetry instead of ripping it out. If you're getting new cabinets, select manufacturers that offer engineered wood carcasses instead of plywood, (but make sure that the materials have low VOC emissions).

Although the initial expense of some of these items may be higher, their reduced energy consumption will eventually make them cost effective. And, who of us can afford not to help reverse the trend of the environment?

Fortunately, as "Green Design" becomes more and more the norm, design choices have increased dramatically, and there are more options for the consumer. No longer is green synonymous with ugly.

As individuals, we cannot hope to make a significant impact on global warming, but if each of us pitches in, the effect will be cumulative. If everyone does their part, perhaps by next year, temperatures will be back to normal, and I won't be shivering while I type *The Kitchen & Bath Insider*<sup>®</sup>.