

*“Green Living”*

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel newspaper*

*705 words*

*August 9, 2004 publication date*

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Old laundry detergent bottles, used newspapers, broken glass. Not exactly the most chic-sounding decorative materials. But these are some of the stars of an emerging residential and commercial design trend.

Sometimes called “green living” or “eco-friendly design,” this movement is all about using recycled, sustainable, non-toxic and/or renewable resources to create living spaces that are healthy for both people and the planet.

Proponents of eco-smart design, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), believe there’s a direct correlation between our living environment and the rise of such ailments as allergies and asthma and vague symptoms like headaches and body aches.

According to research by the EPA, the average person spends 90 percent of their time indoors. This is concerning because the EPA also found that indoor air pollution can be two-five times—and occasionally more than 100 times—higher than outdoor levels. That’s because conventional building and decorating materials are manufactured, treated or applied with chemicals that emit toxins for months or even years. In addition, there are natural health hazards in the air, such as dust, dust mites, mold and mildew.

Solterra Studios in Cedarburg, Wis. specializes in using sustainable, earth-friendly products in their interior designs. “Some people come to me because they want to save every tree, and others come because they’re sick from their building environments,” said Lyn Falk, president of Solterra Studios. “To me, they go hand-in-hand: by taking care of your own health, you are taking care of the environment.”

**Low- or Non-Toxic Materials**

Andy Pace, owner of Safe Building Solutions in Waukesha, Wis. retails a complete line of paints and coatings that are low in odor and free of toxins, as well as natural, renewable and less toxic flooring materials such as Marmoleum. This natural linoleum is manufactured without plastic and vinyl. “We’re seeing a resurgence of natural linoleum not only because of the beautiful colors, but also because the PVCs in vinyl may become the next asbestos or mold problem,” Pace said.

His company also sells a line of chemical-free carpeting, as conventional carpeting can be one of the biggest contributors to unhealthy air in the home or office. “We realize there’s a large amount of people out there who understand the huge dangers of what’s in their home,” he stated. “We’ve responded by selling healthier home products.”

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*Green Living—Add One*  
*M. Jacobus*

### **Eco-Friendly Options**

Agricultural bio-composites—or waste—from crops like wheat combine with newspapers, soy by-product and sunflower seeds to make surprisingly beautiful tabletops that are unique and exude a natural aura, but no toxins. Non-toxic paints, and flooring, fabrics, wall coverings and carpets from chemical-free, natural, sustainable resources like hemp, cork and cotton are some common green materials.

One of the more striking new green resources is concrete embedded with 80 percent recycled glass. Designers are specifying it for countertops. “Now that it’s taking an artsy twist, concrete will rival corian,” Falk predicts. Concrete with glass is about 20 percent more expensive than traditional high-end countertop materials, but other eco-friendly materials are coming more in line with the cost of their high-end, non-green equivalents as consumer demand has been increasing.

Stainless steel is another popular recycled material appropriate for countertops, while melted plastic laundry detergent bottles create a funky-looking resin-like material ideal for basement, workroom or garage countertops and shelving. It can take a beating, but not heat, so it can’t be used for a kitchen or bathroom.

### **Healthy Choices**

Both Falk and Pace see the trend of green products as an outgrowth of recent popular movements toward personal wellness. “The same people who are exercising and eating healthy and organic food are now becoming more informed about the health consequences of their home and office environment,” Pace said.

Mother Earth benefits from this trend as much as people do. Items made from recycled materials save the planet’s resources and energy and cut down on the creation of industrial waste and pollution. And using renewable or sustainable natural supplies such as cork and bamboo means the globe is not being stripped of its resources.

“If the products are comparable in price, durability, maintenance and beauty, why not make a wise choice for yourself and the Earth?” Falk asked. “It’s common sense at that point.”

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