



DISCERNING DESIGN

For renovations both big and small, green designers recommend sustainable products and practices for every budget. BY MEGHAN ZANETICH; PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED

Whether your home needs a total remodel or single-room updates, an interior designer can help you make choices that fit your lifestyle and budget, but shrink your carbon footprint.

"I believe that going green will just become a new way of life for people. It's very exciting," Angelo Surmelis says of the trend he has seen flourish over the past few years. Surmelis is owner of angelo:HOME, a line of home furnishings, and also a television host who has made his mark in ecofriendly living from an early age. During his college years and shortly after, Surmelis found himself shopping at thrift stores, reupholstering and repurposing found objects, and being extremely resourceful due to a tight budget. These simple techniques can get you started on the road to going green, he says. "It's completely attainable at any budget."

But going green doesn't mean your home will be filled with hemp and seagrass. Robin Baron of Robin Baron Design doesn't compromise on high style, and says the green world has caught up on its aesthetic.

"You need to give a sophisticated client a sophisticated product," Baron says, noting this as why she uses certain vendors such as Artistic Tile, Vanguard Furniture, CaesarStone, and Green Electrical Supply, who now provides compact fluorescent light (CFL's) bulbs fit for chandeliers.

Sharing Baron's beliefs is Robin Wilson, of Robin Wilson Home. Wilson says ecofriendly design should be sustainable, reusable, non-toxic, and recyclable. She believes there is no longer a tradeoff in quality or aesthetics within sustainable products. Aside from large projects she often works on, Wilson also consults clients on ecofriendly living.

"If you can't do the big stuff, these are simple things you can do," Wilson says. She offers New York House readers some tips on living sustainably:

- Change your pillows—a brand new pillow weighs 10 ounces, within two to three years it can increase to 20 ounces.
- Change your shower curtain from vinyl to nylon—that will decrease the smell of plastic, as well as exposure to harmful chemicals.

- Use low- or no-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints such as Benjamin Moore's Aura (low-VOC) or Natura (no-VOC)—both are available with the entire palette of Benjamin Moore colors and dry within one hour, leaving chemical smells behind.

- Buy WaterSense faucets and fixtures, including toilets, shower heads, and kitchen and bathroom sinks—they provide low flow technology that combine water and air allowing droplets to feel larger when in actuality less water is being used. Wilson prefers Kohler because both its WaterSense products and standard fixtures cost the same amount.

- Purchase fixtures such as kitchen cabinets that have already been cured and have no formaldehyde based adhesives. Wilson highly recommends Holiday Kitchens, a brand she is a spokeswoman for.

- Take off your shoes—leave the dirt outside and carry your shoes to your room. This will prevent tracking pesticides into your home.

These are all relatively easy changes you can make around your home. But if you're looking to overhaul your dwelling there are many more facets of



LOCATED ON RIVERSIDE DRIVE IN MANHATTAN, THIS SUSTAINABLE KITCHEN, DESIGNED BY ROBIN BARON, FEATURES ENERGY STAR APPLIANCES AND A CAESARSTONE QUARTZ COUNTERTOP.

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sustainable living that you can dive into.

Summelis often finds himself doing gut jobs, dealing with the nuts and bolts of a space. To him, picking tile for floors, backsplash, and countertops is what he enjoys best.

"What makes me most excited is the material that keeps coming out and the amount of choices that are now available," Summelis says. He suggests buyers look locally first, which in turn can cut down on shipping costs. A product he enjoys using on kitchen floors is cork, something he has even installed in his own home. "It's available in so many different looks. It can be marbleized, made to look like hardwood and concrete. It's also inexpensive and unbelievably durable with kids and pets."

Buying pre-sealed cork is the best way to go so you won't have to worry about water damage in kitchens and bathrooms. Another tip he has for homeowners is to ask a lot of questions when dealing with big ticket items.

"If you don't know the answer, make sure you find an interior designer who does, and if they don't, make sure they are willing to find out," Summelis says.

Both big and small renovations can have a huge impact on indoor air quality,

a focus for Interior Design Solution's Susan Aiello, a LEED Accredited Professional (AP). "To me, it's a matter of protecting future generations," Aiello says. She often finds herself working with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood, recycled glass, clay substances such as stucco, and rubber flooring—her favorite brand is Nora.

She suggests homeowners add an energy recovery unit onto their existing HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) system. It mixes cool air with fresh air before it exhausts, which helps to keep energy bills down, while having the proper amount of air exchanges.

Aiello believes that when choosing a designer it is crucial to look for a certification from the National Council for Interior Design Qualification and it is always a plus if they are a LEED AP. She found that when she took her LEED AP test, most of the practices dealing with indoor air quality were things she had been using for quite some time.

"It's about seeing the big picture and making sure we don't do anything to compromise the health of ourselves but most importantly our children," Aiello says. ■