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# MAGAZINE

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## K+B Design: Green – more than just a color

**PLUS:** AN ADDED LAYER OF LIGHTING INNOVATION | CUSTOMIZED CONSERVATION FROM THE GROUND UP





# Shoestring Sustainability: Green on a Budget

Cost-effective practices for the cost-conscious. *By Robin Wilson*



Sustainability practices for manufacturing in cabinetry, countertops and flooring have become a standard expectation for both the consumer and the factory—and one of the basic questions asked of corporations to ascertain an environmental commitment. However the typical consumer who is doing a kitchen or bath renovation will ask the next three questions:

1. Can I afford to be sustainable on budget?
2. Will the products be aesthetically pleasing?
3. Are these products durable?

And the answer is a resounding YES, you can be sustainable, select beautiful products and do it on a shoestring budget.

### Sustainability Defined

There are a lot of buzzwords in the eco-friendly movement: sustainability, recyclability, renewability and all of these words neglect to explain what a consumer needs to finalize a decision, to decide to pay a premium, or just to consider eco-friendly options.

Recently, we received a note from a furniture manufacturer that says everything: "Sustainability and American manufacturing is part of [our] core. The story is only now being told well... and "Made in America" means much more than simply saving a job. It's about saving the American way of life and leaving an environment for [future generations] that is better than the one in which we were born..." So, the simplest definition of sustainability is utilizing a product such as wood, glass or a surface, and finding an opportunity to create a second generation usage.

For example, Holiday Kitchens is a cabinetry manufacturer based in Wisconsin that utilizes waste wood as fire starter pellets (sawdust), cutting boards (wood chunks) and ensures that the wood comes from FSC managed forests that work to replant trees after felling them for use in manufacturing. Yet, their elegant kitchens are beautiful enough to grace the private residence of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and others who are also attracted to the craftsmanship and lifetime warranty.

Or take a sustainable surface product, ECO by Cosentino, which utilizes up-cycled mirrors, bottles and porcelain from old toilets, tubs, sinks – items that would normally enter the landfill – and turning them into a pressurized countertop or tile surface held together with a resin product. Just as beautiful as granite, and sustainable since it is a reused product that does not come from the earth.

### Appealing to Consumers

Many kitchen and bath dealers use technical jargon and forget the simple rule: provide functional and innovative products, but sell a consumer on "why" a product is needed. There are two approaches: price sensitive or product innovative.

If you tell a consumer that an ECO countertop is comparable

to granite, the next question will be about price. Alternatively, if you tell the consumer the product is comparable to granite, similar in price, and will be a great conversation piece during the next dinner party, they will be more apt to inquire and pay the premium.

Similarly, if you explain why bamboo cabinet or flooring is both sustainable and affordable, the back story is going to capture the attention of a consumer. Asking a consumer these questions ►►

## ECO-FRIENDLY ON A BUDGET

### FREE

- > Remove your shoes when you enter your home to keep toxins out
- > Lower the toilet lid each time you flush
- > Freeze your child's stuffed animals once a week for 24 hours to kill dust mites
- > Clean the water pan under your refrigerator

### \$1 TO \$100

- > Install an aerator for your faucet or showerhead (\$1)
- > Replace your vinyl shower curtain liner with a nylon shower curtain liner (\$20)
- > Replace your pillow (\$25)
- > Purchase hypoallergenic pillow and mattress covers (\$9 to \$45)
- > Change all your light bulbs to CFL or LED bulbs (\$2 to \$40/each)
- > Purchase towels made of organic cotton or recycled cotton yarn

### \$100 TO \$500

- > Install carpet tiles in a room instead of wall-to-wall carpet (\$8/each)
- > Purchase Energy Star appliances which are more energy efficient
- > Purchase Water Sense faucets, fixtures and toilets which are more water efficient
- > Install a Solatube device for passive lighting in a hallway or closet

### \$500 TO \$1,000

- > Install a wool-backed rug instead of a vinyl backed rug (\$500 and up)
- > Select a sofa with slip covers that can be cleaned regularly
- > Install a hybrid hot water heater to save thousands on water and electric bills
- > Paint your space with no-to-low VOC paints
- > Use organic cotton sheets on your bed
- > Install a countertop of paperstone, icestone or ECO by Cosentino instead of granite

### \$1,000 TO \$5,000

- > Install eco-friendly custom cabinetry
- > Purchase an eco-healthy foam mattress
- > Purchase a front-load washer and dryer
- > Purchase a nursery set that has non-formaldehyde adhesives



will change the conversation: Did you know that bamboo is a grass? Did you know that some species of bamboo are stronger than red oak? Did you know that some species of bamboo grow up to a meter a day? Did you know that bamboo is grown without pesticides? When a consumer learns about the product and “why” they should consider the product, and the price is similar, they will be more apt to move forward, especially if the price is right.

In addition, the more we support small, innovative firms who are bringing sustainable products to market, the better the economies of scale will be in the future—and pricing will become more affordable. Sustainable manufacturing provides job creation, technological innovation and will allow US based companies to win the battle to survive in this challenging economy.

### Eco & Budget Friendly

Stylish items that are beautiful, functional and affordable are more prevalent in the eco-friendly design sector as consumer demand has begun to increase. Due to supply-and-demand, prices are now lower and options broader for those who know that only five years ago, aesthetics for “green” products were often limited to “plain and simple” to bland. Today, eco-friendly design options range from one to several thousand dollars – and it should be considered that sustainability also refers to the efficient use of electricity and water.

Plumbing fixture companies such as KOHLER have been awarded the WaterSense logo, which means that the products are water efficient, using less per shower or flush. The low-flow showerheads are aesthetically beautiful and the water pressure does not feel like a trickle. The eco-friendly dual-flush plumbing fixtures are priced the same as a standard 1.6 gallon flush toilet, even though it requires more technology—but the company has a strong commitment to protecting the environment.



Project 1 – Kennedy Residence

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Another way to renovate and to be sustainable in your water efficiency is through the use of the hybrid hot water heater technology. This smaller 7-12 gallon hybrid tank is instantly warm, which means consumers do not have water running for 10-minutes each morning to “warm” up the shower. Instead, this creates sustainable practices because water resources are not simply running down the drain. Imagine the 30 gallon water tank in a basement using a significant amount of energy to heat water... or a smaller 7-gallon tank that can be placed almost anywhere in your home to reduce travel distance to the plumbing fixtures. The smaller tank is more affordable, and one tank can typically handle the needs of a standard 4,000 sf home.

#### **Eco-Friendly Design**

Robin Wilson Home is one of the pioneers in eco-friendly design and we have been able to work with some amazing clients—to push the envelope of design to aesthetically “beautiful”, while also educating our clients about multiple options available at various price points. ►►



Hector Sanchez

Project 2 – Man-Cave

## Project 1: Kennedy Residence, New York

- + Task: Transitioning a home with toxic black mold into a new structure with eco-healthy elements
- + Site: New York
- + Client: Eco-leaders with a wish for the “best” and most innovative options available in market
- + Space: 8,700 sf finished space with three levels on 12 acres of land, abutting a private lake

Clients were able to avail themselves of the best options in the market, and all the products represented in the home are considered “best of class” for the timeframe with a focus on technology, efficiency and aesthetic qualities. Team was comprehensive for all trades.

- + Products for success/kitchen: Holiday Kitchens cabinetry, Electrolux appliances, ECO by Cosentino countertops, KOHLER fixtures
- + Products for success/bath: KOHLER fixtures, ECO by Cosentino tile, Mr. Steam spa/sauna, curbless shower

## Project 2: Man-Cave

- + Task: Taking a basement storage space and turning it into a lower-level entertainment space
- + Site: New Jersey
- + Client: Interest in eco-friendly design, afraid of limited options
- + Space: 1,800 sf plan that would become a media room, wine room, exercise room, with storage

Client was open-minded but wanted to ensure that all questions were answered accurately. Team included interior designer, builder, certified kitchen designer/installer, A/V expert, millworker.

- + Products for success/kitchen: Holiday Kitchens cabinetry, SubZero appliances, Silestone countertops, KOHLER fixture, MOHAWK 5” plank engineered flooring with low-VOC Aura paint by Benjamin Moore. All insulation was soy and mill work utilized FSC certified hardwood.
- + Products for success/bath: KOHLER fixtures, Dal Tile, Empire Vanity, Marble Vanity top, glass shower wall

An eco-friendly designer or eco-conscious consumer will visit a certified kitchen designer and may ask questions. But it is a lot better if the dealer is knowledgeable about certain issues in advance. This will allow the client to feel better about paying a premium for sustainable products. Questions may range from off-gassing from paints/stains, efficiency (energy and water), lumen candles for LED lights or sustainability practices of manufacturers. **N**

## KITCHEN & BATH CHECKLIST

### CABINETS

(keywords: off-gassing, FSC certified, VOCs, adhesives)

- all off-gassing from low-to-no VOC paints/stains is done at the factory and baked into the finish
- ensure no formaldehyde based adhesives are used
- ensure that FSC practices are in place where a new tree is planted for every tree felled in to make the cabinetry,
- Bonus:** is waste wood re-used for cutting boards or fire-starter pellets?

### APPLIANCES

- certified by Energy Star program for maximum efficiency
- newer models have linear compression technology (e.g. LG) that modulate cooling power based upon need
- Bonus:** finish will minimize fingerprints if stainless

### COUNTERTOP

- up-cycles products such as bottles, mirrors, porcelain, to prevent landfill debris
- composite materials are as strong as stone, without impacting environment
- Bonus:** recycled stone countertop

### BACKSPLASH

- utilizes glass or ceramic or recycled stone
- Bonus:** purchase surface tile from within a 500 mile radius for manufacturing

### PLUMBING FIXTURES

- certified by WaterSense program for minimum flow rate
- Bonus:** made in the USA

### FLOORING

- certified FSC hardwood, engineered wood
- sustainable coconut palm, bamboo, cork, teak, plywood
- Bonus:** reclaimed boards from a church, barn, factory

### LIGHTING

- LED lights at a 3700 kelvin temperature are similar to incandescent
- LED undermount lights can cover the full spectrum of colors and are discreet
- Bonus:** Philips LED lightbulbs for pendant lights

New York based designer Robin Wilson is an author and nationally recognized eco-friendly and healthy space interior consultant. She has worked on such nationally-known projects as the Harlem office of President Clinton and the White House Fellows office. [www.robinwilsonhome.com](http://www.robinwilsonhome.com)