

The Washington Post

Live Chat

Q&A:

Robin Wilson on making design choices based on wellness and health

October 22, 2020, 11:01 A.M.

New York designer Robin Wilson specializes in eco-friendly homes, rooms and products. She has written two books on creating wellness and health focused living environments. Wilson is able to provide simple tips for each room of a house or apartment and has ideas on how to choose hypoallergenic products. She is an expert on topics including sustainability and how to design for allergy and asthma sufferers.

Every week, Jura Koncius helps you in your quest to achieve domestic bliss. She and weekly guests, whether Martha Stewart, Marie Kondo, the Property Brothers or Amy Astley, editor-in-chief of Architectural Digest, answer your decorating, design and decluttering questions. Jura is always happy to whip out her paint chips, track down a hard-to-find piece of furniture or offer her seasoned advice on practical living and organizing. For more than 20 years, our Thursday Q&A has been an online conversation about the best way to make your home comfortable, stylish and fun. We invite you to submit questions and share your own great tips, ideas and gripes. No problem is too big or too small.

The Discussion



Oct 22, 2020

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Jura Koncius :

I'm welcoming Robin Wilson this morning to talk about healthy homes. With all the allergies and asthma out there and focus on keeping the air in our homes clean, there is lots to chat about.

– *October 22, 2020 10:38 AM*

Robin Wilson :

Hello everyone! Look forward to answering your questions about eco-friendly, hypoallergenic and sustainable design options for your spaces!

ROBIN WILSON

www.robinwilsonhome.com

– *October 22, 2020 10:55 AM*

Rug pads for layering?

I'm buying a couple of smaller area rugs to layer over a room-size carpet. Is there any particular type of pad I should use to keep the area rugs as secure as possible on that surface? Thank you.

– October 21, 2020 4:58 PM

ROBIN WILSON :

I recommend felt rug pads for your space. Felt rug pads can be cut easily to size and most come with varied thickness. I do not recommend options that have a petroleum or vinyl base as they can sometimes discolor a hardwood floor.

Consider Wayfair or [Rug Pad](#) websites

– October 22, 2020 11:00 AM

Wellness, memories and smiles

In the kitchen -- I had college students a few years back and let them take my duplicates and extras. Amazing, I never missed a pot, plate, glasses, bowls or utensils that went to college. I even told their friends when they move out to stop by and shop in my kitchen. The biggest hit with the college and post graduation friends??? Fluted champagne glasses from the 80s.

– October 21, 2020 6:08 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

What a wonderful way to up-cycle your kitchen items by sharing with your community.

– October 22, 2020 11:01 AM

dogs

I am going to get a dog, even though I'm allergic. What can I do inside my home to help my allergies from flaring up?

– October 22, 2020 10:14 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

Most people who have animal dander allergies clean a bit more frequently or train their animals to refrain from curling up on a certain chair - so that chair remains "free from dander". I recommend that you consider a room vacuum that be programmed to sweep during the day to remove pet hair and use Swiffer regularly to pick up dust, hair and dander. Ask your physician and a local vet which species are the least allergenic. Good luck!

– *October 22, 2020 11:05 AM*

Home accessories that are eco friendly

You often see furniture that is labeled with eco friendly materials but smaller home furnishings like pillows, decorative accessories often do not have such labeling. Do you have any resources you might recommend?

– *October 21, 2020 7:25 PM*

ROBIN WILSON :

You are correct, there are few labels on decorative items. One web resource is the [Sustainable Furnishings Council](#). The SFC is a leading non profit that guides consumers to the best companies that have eco-friendly practices and products. All their information is free and they have a scorecard for furniture and furnishings.

– *October 22, 2020 11:08 AM*

In a very old rental home

This year we are temporarily in a very old rental home. Baseboard electric heat that we have no control over - so I purchased an air purifier for our bedroom for the winter months. Should I be concerned about the air in other rooms?

– *October 21, 2020 7:20 PM*

ROBIN WILSON :

You spend one-third of your life sleeping and the bedroom is the most important space to consider for an air purifier. Make sure to change the filter regularly. If you are working from home or use your living room, you might

want to consider an air purifier for those rooms too. I also recommend opening your windows for 5 minutes each day to let fresh air in, especially in a home office where VOCs may be emitted by your printer or other electronics. Good luck!

– October 22, 2020 11:10 AM

Cold weather seating

This summer I would have some ice cold water and candles outdoors to decompress. Now I am thinking of just one chair and hot chocolate. DD puts a blanket/throw in the dryer to warm it up and then uses it. I think this will be my happy hour outdoor routine after a WFH and zoom meetings.

– October 22, 2020 10:46 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

What a great idea for the winter months - to have a hot drink and sit under a warm blanket on your porch or balcony. Consider a weighted blanket from [Clean Design Home](#) which is available at 7 lbs, 12 lbs and 20 lbs, plus a throw option. This can really make it feel like a hug while you enjoy your meditation moment!

– October 22, 2020 11:12 AM

Buy lesslook in your closets more.

I was surprised at how much lotions, body sprays, etc I had when I didn't go out. Every sale I was buying. Now I don't need to buy any items for myself. Silly to have a 1 year supply for 2021 and not know it. Fall is here and on my daily walks I take pictures and maybe pick up an interesting stone. I bought mums for my deck so I can see their beauty daily vs the front door. Collected rocks go in glasses, cups or saucers for a touch of earth tones. I am using my "good" dishes daily. Miracles I haven't killed my two indoor plants, low maintenance.

– October 17, 2020 8:01 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

So many of us have changed our shopping habits during this pandemic, and while we have organized our pantries and closets, we have "found" things that make a full pantry. If you have too many toiletries that may expire, you might want to consider donating some to a homeless or battered womens organization so that individuals can have toiletries during the winter months.

– October 22, 2020 11:14 AM

Adapt and redesign

I have friends who have begun to comment on my proposed redesign. U have decided to have more opened concept to accommodate the sight and communication efficiency of my hearing impaired famy and friends. I will build large pocket doors to segment rooms to create a cozy vibe. I want to create a master suite for friends who have challenges negotiating stairs. My idea is to create mini master suites by constructing Murphy beds along walls that buttress ADA compliant bathrooms. These Murphy beds are expensive! Can you help with a less costly alernative?

– October 18, 2020 8:57 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

While some Murphy Beds are elaborate, there are many price points. The most important thing is to select an option that is safe and will secure properly to the wall. At varied prices, here are some firms that I recommend. Consider [Wayfair](#), [Resource Furniture](#) and [Lori Wall Beds](#). If you are trying to be ADA compliant, make sure that the bed is not too low to the ground for ease of getting in and out of the bed.

– October 22, 2020 11:28 AM

Ahead of the curve Christmas tree question:

We have had an artificial tree for more than fifteen years. I was wondering if they should be cleaned or vacuumed somehow. It is put away in plastic bags, then stored in the air-conditioned basement. Still, I am curious if after all these years, it is necessary to do some dust/particulate removal? The tree is in

good shape otherwise. I prefer artificial to natural for allergy reasons. Is it time to get a next-generation tree?

– October 22, 2020 11:15 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

In my opinion, it is time to get a NEW tree as some older trees have chemicals that off-gas and the older the tree, the greater the possibility that it may have lead. Read this [NBC News report](#) on older holiday decorations! Do your research to select your best new artificial trees, but know that many lists say that IKEA has done a lot of testing on their trees due to European standards. Also, make sure to use LED bulbs to lower the risk of fire hazards. Make sure to store the same way you have been doing and vacuum annually!

– October 22, 2020 11:34 AM

Laundry

I'm always concerned about chemicals in my laundry detergents. What should I be looking for in terms of killing germs but also being friendly to the environment?

– October 22, 2020 11:32 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

My top choice is the Seventh Generation product line as it is plant based and concentrated, so a little bit goes a long way! Know that many earth friendly options are safe for those with allergies and chemical sensitive skin. I recommend that you consider ultra concentrated liquid detergent as it is on hand for a while, and does not have extra packaging like a pod. Your goal is to rely on plant-based surfactants (like coconut) instead of synthetic ingredients to wash away dirt and grime. And make sure that your appliances are Energy Star certified.

– October 22, 2020 11:40 AM

cleaning

What cleaning supplies are eco-friendly as well as being touch on germs?

– October 22, 2020 11:30 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

The most important consideration is to remember that the most eco-friendly is the old fashioned vinegar, bleach, baking soda and lemon juice, plus toothpaste can clean crayon off the walls. But, most of these options require a lot of elbow grease, so if you are selecting a store bought cleaner, my favorites are Caldrea, Mrs. Meyers, PUR Home, METHOD and Seventh Generation. Remember that the words "eco" and "natural" are not regulated by the government so you must make sure to review the ingredients before you select your products.

– October 22, 2020 11:43 AM

vacs

What do you think of robotic vacuums? Do they remove a lot of allergens?

– October 22, 2020 11:27 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

While robotic vacuums are relatively new for most consumers, they are a great alternative to those who have limited time and are working from home. The [iRobot ROOMBA 960](#) is a robotic vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter and it has a high efficiency filter to trap pet dander. From what I have learned, it also works with your smart devices and WiFi. It is a great feeling to hear the whirring in the background and knowing that after your zoom calls, your space will be vacuumed clean!

– October 22, 2020 11:48 AM

Carpeting

What is the best kind of rugs and carpets to get to avoid all that off-gassing and chemical residue? Are area rugs better?

– October 22, 2020 11:40 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

I recommend natural wool rugs and carpets (e.g. Berber) and suggest that you stay away from the less expensive polypropylene options which are petroleum based unless you are using them outdoors. Also consider using a felt rug pad so that you do not discolor a hardwood floor. Area rugs are good if you have a choice because during your annual spring clean, you can take them out and shake them. But, if carpet is your only choice, try to ask for a jute or rubber backing instead of vinyl backing.

– October 22, 2020 11:52 AM

Allergies and curtains

Hello! I have allergies. I know curtains are pretty much dust catchers, but I really dislike blinds! Are there any curtains that somehow AREN'T giant dust catchers that are also not an arm and a leg?

– October 22, 2020 10:10 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

– October 22, 2020 11:56 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

One of the companies that I recommend most because they offer FREE measuring and inexpensive installation is [Smith & Noble](#). They have a product called [Sheer Shadings](#) which has the blind inside the shade, so you can control the amount of light and can be customized to the size of the window. Shades are a great option because they are flat and you can vacuum them on a regular basis.

– October 22, 2020 11:56 AM

Jura Koncius :

Thank you Robin for sharing all of this important information. Here's an alert for next week, we will be using a new publishing platform for the Washington Post Live chats so things will look a little different, especially if you post questions. My guest next week is Melanie Berliet of the Spruce and she'll be giving her thoughts on small space decorating and living. [You can post your questions here now.](#)

– October 22, 2020 12:00 PM

Cleaning service during pandemic?

I am a chronic allergy sufferer. My neighbors are renovating their adjacent townhouse. Both houses are very old and connected. I'm getting a lot of construction dust in my home. Should I hire a cleaning service? Is it safe during the pandemic? I used to have one but I was concerned about their precautions and the quality of their work. Thank you.

– October 22, 2020 11:54 AM

ROBIN WILSON :

I would absolutely hire a cleaning service after they are done with their construction, especially since some older homes have lead and the dust that gathers could contain lead which can affect your health and that of young children. In the short term, you could:

install plastic over your windows on the neighbors side, and also cover the ceiling/floor vents with plastic if you are not running your heat.

Change your air vents frequently if you are running air conditioning.

Keep damp paper dry sheets in front of the door and window jambs to collect dust.

Use a swiffer dry broom cloth or drying sheets to collect dust on a daily basis.

Good luck during construction!

– October 22, 2020 12:01 PM