

Fall 2014

 **btw**

BEHIND
the
WALLS

*Can Healthy Homes
be Gorgeous Homes?*

(Hint: The answer is yes)



BRUCE IRVING

*renovation
&
real estate
services*

When it's time to buy, sell
or renovate your home,
take advantage of
Bruce Irving's
25-year experience with
houses -

17 of them as producer of



Find out what he can do
for you at

www.bruceirving.biz

617-719-2196

bruce@bruceirving.biz



inside

6/ editor's letter

8/ publisher's letter

homefront

10/ what is green building?

Steve Thomas, home expert and host of This Old House, defines the oft-misunderstood term once and for all.

12/ unexpectedly green

Not all sustainability-minded home products are marketed under a green banner. These sleek vignettes feature pieces with environmental cred that might otherwise go unnoticed.

featured

18/ the myth of organic furniture

Many home goods companies have been peddling their products as 'organic' for years. But are they being truthful? And if not, what's the next best thing?

20/ everything old is cutting-edge new again

Proof that you can't judge a home by its cover: a cozy, traditional Irish farmhouse built in New England that's about as advanced in energy technology as you can get.

26/ the healthiest home in new england

How one couple's massive mission to build the ultimate in clean, disease-free abodes is now a model for others in our region.

32/ gearing up

As home automation gets increasingly sophisticated, the spectrum of products and services gets more complex and crowded. Here are some of the top options right now.

last words

36/ pure genius

For design diva Robin Wilson, homes are healthiest and most beautiful when they're ultraclean—in both hygiene and design

LOCKWOOD CONSTRUCTION



Lockwood Construction is a Brookline based full service company specializing in high quality restorations.

Working with a team of architects, engineers and building contractors, Lockwood Construction's approach is to dramatically lower or eliminate the use of fossil fuels currently used in homes.

lockwoodconstruction.net

617-277-6312

icci.construction@verizon.net

FROM THE EDITOR

Breaking Ground



The words you're reading at this exact second belong to our first-ever Healthy Homes issue—a multi-perspective delve into how to make your house as good for everyone who lives in it as it is for the environment. Those ways cover the gamut: everything from recycled wallcoverings and organic, locally made furniture to ingenious home tech solutions that prevent common and debilitating allergies.

All of those ideas in the following pages come straight from experts who certainly know how to make things function efficiently inside our houses (or 'Behind The Walls,' so to speak), but also happen to prioritize making them beautiful. Take green building guru Steve Thomas. Or the architectural teams at Studio Troika and L.Da, who are creating sustainable spaces with aplomb. Or designer Robin Wilson—a powerhouse of inspired, clean living. Sure, all of these people are talented enough that they could essentially be printing money by doing more traditional work in their respective fields. But instead they decided to push the envelope from an aesthetic standpoint as well as an ecological one. They're remarkable because they came up with new ideas to dovetail the two, since they believe in both.

We've pulled their stories into our pages and into our BTW community because they share our mission: We're all committed to helping more people like you create a healthy, earth-friendly, wallet-friendly, and beautiful home. And now we need you to join our community, too.

We're about to launch our very first Kickstarter campaign (see it at www.BTW.build/kickstarter) to raise funds to further expand our reach. (Just in case you think a Kickstarter has something to do with soccer, it doesn't. It's a crowdfunding effort wherein everyone pitches in a bit of dough to support an effort.) In our case, that effort will be to get this magazine in the hands of even more people, and teach more of our neighbors the value of living well for both the planet and themselves.

'Breaking ground' may be primarily a construction term, but we also think of it an apt description of how the entire BTW community is changing the landscape of home living. Enjoy the issue.

Alexandra Hall
Editor, BTW

PROFILE / PURE GENIUS

For Robin Wilson, homes are most healthy and beautiful by being ultraclean—in both hygiene and design.

By ALEXANDRA HALL



"WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU WASHED YOUR PILLOW?"

asks Robin Wilson, in all seriousness. "They last a long time, so if you don't wash them, that's pretty much like having dirty pillows for 10 years." For her, that isn't just some kind of Home Ec 101 test question. It's a matter of personal health and happiness. And, it turns out, professional happiness, too.

Wilson, who grew up in Austin, Texas as a pan-allergic child, battled illnesses caused by pollutants, mold, dust, and chemicals in her house for years (to a point where she was constantly in and out of the hospital), and had to stay inside during peak pollen times. "My parents had a really rough time," she says. "They had a lot to deal with. But thankfully, our doctor recognized that the environment that people are in has an impact on how you live." In an effort to make everything right, the family made major changes to their home: the family dog

became an outside dog, for starters. All of the carpets in the house were removed.

Fast forward several years to Wilson as a healthy, active child. "Instead of just using an inhaler, I did track, and swimming, and whatever I had to do to get my lungs strong," she recalls. "Gradually, my asthma and allergy symptoms began to dwindle."

Her recovery wasn't just monumental because it was a recovery; it was also a very teachable moment—a personal and professional turning point. "Since then, she's built a formidable brand, Robin Wilson Home, a company that does beautiful interior design—her aesthetic is "classic with a modern touch", and defined by clean simplicity—and also focuses on wellness in the home with simple solutions to make it easier for consumers and clients. "Years ago, when I wanted to buy sheets to manage my allergy symptoms, everything hypoallergenic was always marked up," says the entrepreneur, who started her career at Oliver Wyman Consulting [then Mercer Management Consulting] in Boston.

She left her Manhattan corporate job in 1999 after a windfall from an IPO, and started her entrepreneurship dream by 2000, focused on project management for residential and commercial clients. By 2008, after years of building her design business for commercial and residential clients, primarily by word of mouth and through media exposure, she signed her first licensing deal for RWH kitchen cabinetry, made by Holiday Kitchens. A year later, she signed her second licensing deal for textiles. Today, the cabinets are sold by over 400 independent dealers nationwide, and the textiles are sold at Bed Bath & Beyond, and other retailers under a sub-brand.

Plus, she has a line of heirloom quality furniture, made in the USA, that is sold on The Nest Store website to keep costs down for consumers since there is not a retail markup—made of sustainable forested maple and oak, in 12 elegant, eco-friendly upholstery options. For the 2014 holiday season, she has designed a line of limited edition hand-sewn quilts that will launch on the Bed Bath & Beyond website. And in 2015, she'll be launching a baby line, and publishing her second book, which will be filled with photos of her work and tips for cleaning and design for every room in the home. In her spare time (which it's tough to believe she has any of) she works with a few select clients a year on their design



projects, all while managing her toddler. “Everything I do is to guide a consumer to a wellness lifestyle that is both non-toxic and beautiful,” she says.

Her aesthetic is always classic with a modern touch, and defined by clean simplicity—yet also aims to make health in the home far, far easier than it’s ever been.

Speaking of that aforementioned pillow, it’s the perfect example of how she’s managed to pinpoint a happy medium between affordability, allergy-awareness, and ingenious design. After having a new baby and trying to make the bed while sleep-deprived one too many times, she realized there was a simple solution: “We paid the extra pennies it costs to put the zipper on the long side of our pillows instead of the short end,” she says. The result is that it’s far easier and quicker to put the pillow in the case. “Maybe our pillow costs one dollar more, but that’s it.” Moreover, the pillows have a hidden zipper, which eliminates the possibility of finding marks on your face after a restful sleep.

Those are the kinds of answers that Wilson’s intent on continuing to find. As for the answer to her original question, she has a very definitive one. “You should wash your pillow every three months,” she says. “Little things like that can make all the difference.”

Above:
Robin Wilson’s design work highlights beauty and cleanliness.



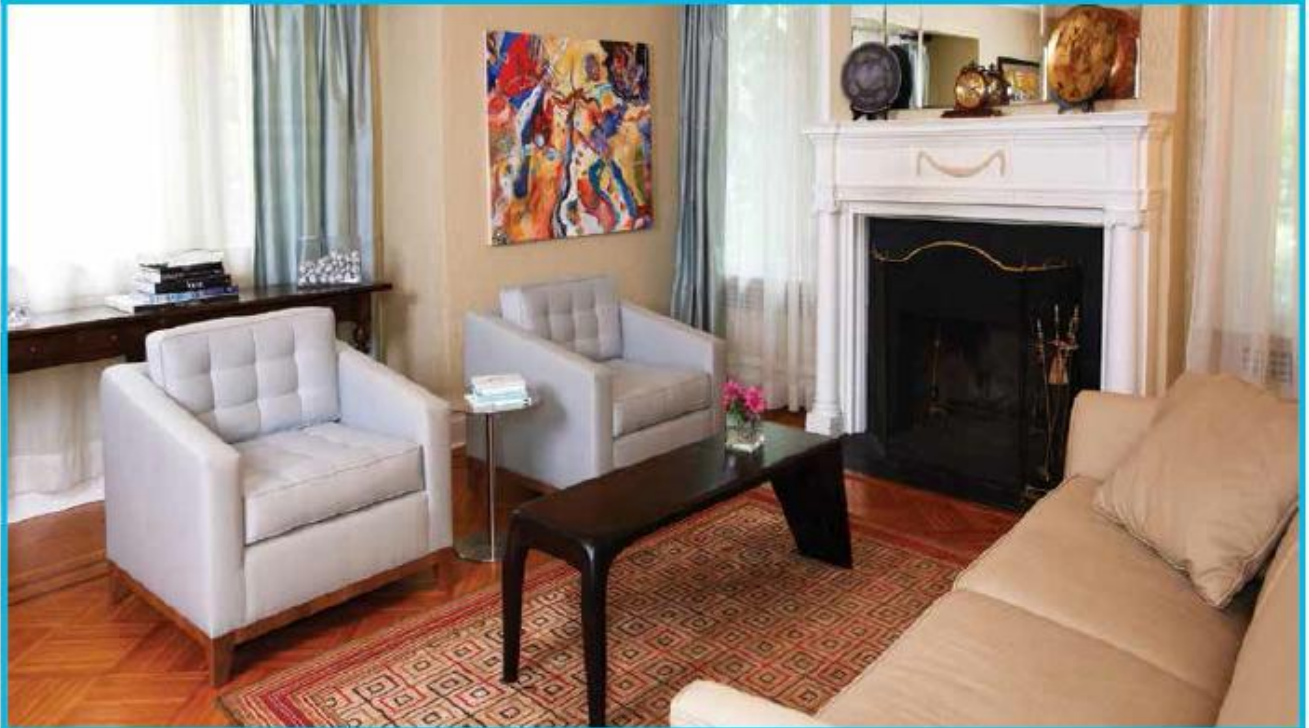
TIPS FROM THE QUEEN OF CLEAN

As someone who struggled with asthma and allergies as a child, home design extraordinaire Robin Wilson has had to learn first-hand about preventing such ailments in the house. “One in six Americans suffer with asthma and allergies caused by dangerous irritants and chemicals,” she says. “That’s like the country having an epidemic that no one’s come up with a treatment for. It’s time for us—as mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and community members—to take action to shape the health of our own homes, and lives.”

After years of working hard to conquer the diseases, she’s since dedicated her career to guiding the public toward healthier homes. To that end, here are her favorite products and personal tips:

1. Take your shoes off when you get home. Shoes track in e coli and pesticides because we’ve walked in grass and sidewalks that have been chemically retreated and soiled by animals. Keeping that outside is the easiest way to keep all of that at bay.
2. If you have a vinyl shower curtain, replace it. Vinyl’s believed to be an endocrine disruptor. For women who want to get a pregnant or if you have a young boy, this can possibly lead to serious health issues.
3. Buy paints that contain no (or are low in) Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC). Benjamin Moore has a great selection of nontoxic paints that will help you breathe better and, thanks to the incredible colors, still have a gorgeous home.
4. Switch cleaners and soaps. My go-to line is Caldrea. Yes, it comes in all kinds of unusually beautiful scents, but has the huge added benefit of being non-toxic. So it’s a cleaning product that soothes and works to clean, but that you’re not afraid of. (With some products, I truly worry. I mean, seriously: Would you want your kids playing in a chemical factory?)
5. Get up to speed on vacuums. My favorite is the Panasonic Jet Force Vacuum. It’s affordable, and comes in three different versions: urban, upright, and a canister. Each one has a bagless container system that can be washed out with water, so you’re not seeing or coming into contact with all that dust (or the potential health problems) it contains.
6. Replace your linens with hypoallergenic ones. I’m partial to my own line, of course, which I designed with allergies, affordability, functionality, and beauty in mind. As for how to treat any of your linens, I use the rule of threes. Which is this: Every three weeks, wash your pillow protector. Every three months, wash your pillow. Every years, replace your pillow.
7. Get rid of wall-to-wall carpeting. Instead, install hardwood or bamboo floors. Dust your floors frequently and have them professionally cleaned twice a year (in fall and spring, preferably). If it’s more cost-effective for you, just go outside and shake the rugs out in the backyard and let them sit there, to air out remaining dust particles. It’ll make a world of difference.
8. If you’re redoing your kitchen, opt for a company with products made in the U.S. Holiday Kitchens is a great option; they only use non-formal glues. That’s important because it’s a space where temperature changes happen, so more off-gassing occurs. And given how families congregate in that room more than any other, you want to be especially careful.
9. Aim for anti-bacterial countertops that are man-made (my favorite brand is Silestone). These materials have no cracks or fissures, which essentially eliminates mold.
10. Switch your faucets and fixtures. If you have the budget for it, go for ones with touchless faucets and toilets; they eliminate germ transfers. Kohler has some that lets you just wave your hand in front of them, and water comes out for a certain amount time, then turns off automatically. With the toilets, they flush themselves.
11. Purchase LED lightbulbs for your house. A great brand is Cree—each of their bulbs lasts 10 years.
12. Systemize your in-home recycling. This way you know you’re throwing things away the right way, and it also teaches your family the habit of proper waste management.





ROBIN WILSON HOME

Eco-Friendly Designs for Home and Lifestyle.

Cabinetry | Linens | Furniture

www.RobinWilsonHome.com

© 2014 Robin Wilson Home

**BED BATH &
BEYOND**
Buy Online and at Stores