

STYLE

Designer makes eco-friendly home products practical, stylish

Robin Wilson focuses on principles intended to lessen damage to the environment.

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Designer Robin Wilson has been aware of the environmental effects of her surroundings since she was a little girl in Austin.

As a child with asthma, she was diagnosed as being pan-allergic. Her parents made lifestyle changes hoping to alleviate some of her symptoms, buying organic, gluten-free, natural foods and exchanging carpeting for tile. The sacrifices and enhancements improved her health, made a lasting impact on her lifestyle and would ultimately direct her career path.

"Austin is a fundamental foundation to my life and how I see the world," says Wilson, who was in town recently from New York, where the University of Texas graduate is now based.

Her multiplatform brand, Robin Wilson Home, encompasses the Nest Store online (theneststore.com), interior design/renovation services and custom cabinetry. Her brand is built on the principles of eco-friendliness: working with reusable, nontoxic, recyclable, sustainable products and practicing responsible construction and renovation.

She learned about construction with integrity from her great-grandfather, who built simple homes for people who did not have a lot of money. Although the homes were not extravagant, he believed in quality construction and that all people had a right to sufficient housing, she says. His craftsmanship and kindness taught her basic values about family and home.

"He believed in keeping people whole even during bad times," she says.

Wilson became interested in energy conservation while doing an internship at the Lower Colorado River Authority in the energy conservation group (she worked for Jerry Lawson, who now runs the federal government's Energy Star program, which encourages environmental protection through energy efficiency).



Robin Wilson Home by Holiday Kitchens
Robin Wilson's cabinet designs are coated with low-VOC (volatile organic compound) paints by Benjamin Moore.



Photo by Vanessa Lenz
Austin-raised designer Robin Wilson's brand, Robin Wilson Home, includes interior design/renovation services and custom cabinetry that are built on the principles of eco-friendliness.



Robin Wilson Home by Holiday Kitchens
In January, designer Robin Wilson teamed up with Holiday Kitchens, a Wisconsin company, to offer environmentally friendly, custom-made kitchen cabinets.

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After earning a bachelor's degree at UT, Wilson moved to New York, where she got a master's degree in real estate finance from New York University. She worked in management consulting and executive recruiting before establishing her firm in 2000. Her business, which began in an apartment she describes as "the size of a Texas walk-in closet," has grown exponentially. Projects now include celebrity homes and 17,000-square-foot buildings in New York City and beyond.

She renovated Sheila Bridges' original design of former President Bill Clinton's Harlem office in seven days.

Wilson is known as a pioneer in the eco-minded movement who aims to help people make practical adjustments in their lives to lessen their effect on the environment.

"Be eco-friendly and do what you can. That's my brand," she says. Wilson sees the importance of making healthful choices for your home environment as tantamount to keeping your family healthy.

Hitting the shelves soon will be a book chronicling Wilson's experience reconstructing Bobby and Mary Kennedy Jr.'s home in Westchester County, N.Y., which was badly damaged first by a flood and then brought to the brink by black mold. Wilson's challenge was to re-create the original character of their home and its antiques while incorporating updated, eco-friendly appliances.

Wilson worked as part of what she calls the "Green Dream Team," which includes celebrity builder Bob Vila.

In January, Wilson inked her first licensing endeavor with Holiday Kitchens, a 64-year-old company that even recycles the sawdust it produces in its daily cabinetry construction.

Holiday Kitchens and Wilson are teaming up to offer environmentally friendly custom-made kitchen cabinets, which are available through more than 400 dealers nationwide.

Her frameless cabinet designs allow for more storage, are coated with low-VOC (volatile organic compound) paints by Benjamin Moore and use glue without formaldehyde.

Additionally, at the Architectural Digest Home Design Show in March, Wilson launched a line of soy, cotton-wick candles, hand-poured by Hurricane Katrina survivors. These soon will be available on a larger scale.

As for the future, her audience might be expanding; she is in talks to have a television show of her own. ■