

HOME & DESIGN

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GREG CLARK

GREEN UP THE HOUSE

Eco-friendly furniture gains momentum

BY CHARLYNE VARKONYI SCHAUB
Special to The Miami Herald

Forget “crunchy” furniture that looks like it was discovered in an old hippie commune from the 1960s.

“Green” or sustainable furniture now has a level of style and sophistication we didn’t see three years ago when the eco-friendly design movement first gained momentum. Eco-friendly no longer has to mean furniture that looks like it was thrown together from the scrap pile.

“Choosing something environmentally friendly doesn’t mean it has to be stark, uncomfortable or unusual in any way,” says Jackie Hirschhaut, vice president of public relations and marketing for the American Home Furnishings Alliance, the largest

STYLISH: Above, room designed by German Brun of Den Architecture in Miami features a reupholstered chair salvaged from a sidewalk, a natural sisal run (background) and VOC-free paint. Right, Omni Compact Work Center for a home office is in cherry hardwood from Copeland Furniture (\$2,299).

trade association representing the home furnishings industry. She cited the example of C.R. Laine, one of the first manufacturers to use repurposed

•TURN TO FURNITURE, 4H



COPELANDFURNITURE.COM

For spring cleaning, swap out those nasty chemicals

BY TERRI BENNETT
McClatchy News Service

Spring is here. Time to open the windows, let that fresh air in and rejuvenate your cleaning routine. This year make that deep-down clean as green as it can be. There are lots of options for eco-friendly cleaners that will help you do your part to keep dangerous chemicals out of the environment,

both inside and outside your home.

Yes, the air inside your home can be polluted and, in fact, could actually be worse than the air outdoors. One contributor to poor air quality inside is chemical cleaners. Through residues left behind on floors and surfaces or fumes in the air, these chemicals can contaminate your home. Plus, research shows links between these chemicals and

a number of health issues ranging from asthma and allergies to reproductive problems.

And the problems don’t stop there. When we put those nasty chemicals down the drain, traces of them bypass the water treatment process, contaminating the environment.

•TURN TO CLEANING, 4H



GARDENS

Smart design begins with easy-care plan

BY MARTY ROSS
Universal Uclick

Smart garden design takes a lot of the work out of gardening. If you plan it right, you can have a beautiful garden that lets you take weekends off.

Truly low-maintenance gardens are carefully planned spaces. They are in scale with your property and with your expectations. They’re full of

FEWER CHORES: A low-maintenance landscape makes gardening easier.

attractive plants that thrive in your climate without pampering. The flower beds are showy without being chaotic, and the lawn is a cool, carefully framed green picture, but doesn’t gobble up your time, money or energy.

When you get it right, a low-maintenance landscape makes gardening look easy.

“Designing from the top of your head may work, but it will most likely work better if you write it down and do a simple plan,” says Jack McKin-

•TURN TO GARDENS, 7H

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FURNITURE

Eco-friendly design gaining momentum

*FURNITURE, FROM 1H

plastic bottles in the soft fiberfill of the upholstery backs of well-designed sofas.

The move toward eco-friendly or sustainable furniture is gaining momentum nationally. Other well-known companies like Copeland, Century and La-Z-Boy are joining the movement. So are fabric companies such as Schumacher, the Q Collection and O Echo Textiles.

Hirschhau's trade association has been helping manufacturers through a process to help them make more green furniture and reduce their manufacturing's environmental impact.

"We have been seeing the eco-wave about three years," she says. "The materials being used are not all revolutionary with the exception of soy-based foam." The foam became a springboard for upholstery companies to use other green products such as natural fiber covers, sustainably harvested wood frames, recycled metal springs and nontoxic glues, she says.

GREEN SHOPPERS

Despite the increase in choices, only 8 percent of mainstream furniture buyers said they had purchased eco-friendly or green furniture, according to the 2009 Sustainable by Design Consumer Marketing Research Study conducted last October for the alliance. These green shoppers said they believed that the sustainable furniture was higher quality and they were willing to pay an additional 10 percent or more for it.

Consumers aren't alone.



GROOVYSTUFF

BRANCH OUT: Lamp from the Antares Lighting Collection is crafted from branches and roots of reclaimed teak (\$249 at www.groovystuff.com).

Many designers and architects are also reluctant to go green.

"Designers often think sustainability means too much work and too much money," Jobi Blachy told designers recently in the Nessen showroom at the Design Center of the Americas in Dania Beach. Blachy is president of Edward Ferrell + Lewis Mittman, a New York manufacturer of green furniture.

"Only 10 percent buy the furniture because it is sustainable and 90 percent because it's beautiful."

Cost doesn't have to be a stumbling block. Industry experts say green furniture costs only 10 to 20 percent more

than other furniture.

Herman Brun, a Miami architect and co-founder of the South Florida Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council, says green has been popular in Europe for years, then Californians picked up the concept. It just began to take off in South Florida about 1½ years ago, says Brun, who owns Den Architecture with his wife, Lizmarie Esparza.

Despite the increased availability of green furniture, Brun says his clients are more into green building — solar panels and efficient plumbing, lighting and appliances — than green furniture.

"We are not getting the demand that would justify huge production of the furniture," he says. "Most of the green furniture we use is produced custom by local craftsmen."

USED PRODUCTS

New furniture isn't the only alternative. Brun says the most sustainable furniture is used or reclaimed. Since it was already produced, the carbon footprint is minimal. He often finds pieces at salvage yards and flea markets.

Interior designer Nancy Astrid Lindo of Astrid Design Studio in San Francisco, an eco design and green consulting firm, also recommends that consumers shop at thrift, vintage and antique stores. She spoke recently on "Designing for a New Era" at MiaGreen Expo and Conference in Miami, a major green event for architects, engineers, designers and builders.

"Designers are known for creating interiors and doing a lot of fluff work," she says. "I want to help them understand they have a much greater responsibility not to create just gorgeous interiors but to create a small eco system within the larger eco system."

This means using furniture made with no toxic finishes, glues and adhesives, paired with organic fabrics and wood sourced from sustainable forests. If an old piece is being reupholstered, she suggests



C.R. LAINE

NATURAL PLACE TO SIT: Lisbon Sofa is covered in cotton fabric, framed with sustainably harvested wood, wired with recycled metal springs and stuffed with soy-based foam (\$3,864 at www.crlaine.com).



MAITLAND-SMITH

KNOTTY WOOD: Driftwood was repurposed for this 'Bombe' chest (\$6,750 at www.maitland-smith.com).

using soy or rubber as stuffing and going back to organic cotton, wool and horsehair.

But finding eco-friendly furniture outside of used sources isn't that easy. The movement, still in its infancy, has no standard definition or government oversight. It does have independent certification programs that can help consumers identify green products such as GreenGuard (www.greenguard.org) and the Forest Stewardship Council (www.fsc.org).

Companies are still "greenwashing," or making claims for green that are exaggerated or aren't true. And some furniture retailers may remove the hangtags that designate third-party certification.

Lindo suggests using a design professional to determine if the furniture is really green.

"A lot of manufacturers claim to be sustainable, and to the untrained eye they can convince you that a product is green when it isn't," she says. "A trained eye can peel back the layers and ask questions of the manufacturers so you can determine if it is sustainable."

If you don't want to use a designer, a good source for

information is www.regreenprogram.org. The website, sponsored by the American Society of Interior Designers and the U.S. Green Building Council, offers a series of guidelines and sources for green remodeling.

MAKE AN IMPACT

Blachy says you don't have to do a whole house green to make a difference. Even one or two green pieces of furniture can make an impact. Ask for certification, such as Forestry Stewardship Council or GreenGuard. Ask for a sustainability statement. Ask for the origin of materials. And ask for one with low emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

"I think the main thing is to help people understand that sustainable, green and eco are not just for a certain demographic or a certain stereotype," Lindo says. "Healthy living and healthy interiors can fit any budget. We need to demand these things of furniture manufacturers and vote with our dollars."

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Defining green

What makes furniture sustainable?

- It contains low or no volatile organic compound (VOC) fumes in paint and finishes. Paints low in VOCs do not release harmful gases as much as conventional paints and contain fewer toxins. Ask for no or low VOC finishes.
- Wood is certified, which means it is what it claims to be and has gone through an approval process. Sustainably harvested wood is cut to allow regeneration and ongoing supply. Bamboo regenerates quickly but can be tricky because some sources are clear-cutting forests. Ask for a sustainability statement from a group such as the Forestry Stewardship Council, which should be listed on a hangtag.
- Materials are natural, like organic jute trim and webbing, soy-based foam, no chlorine down, cushions encased in bamboo and organic cotton ticking. Ask about origin of materials.
- It is made locally or in this country. Shipping from overseas increases the environmental footprint because of the fuel it takes to reach its destination. Ask where the furniture was manufactured.
- Recycled or reclaimed materials are used, such as metal springs, plastic bottles, glass. Reclaimed wood can come from old furniture, old houses or logs that sank to river bottoms. Ask if anything is recycled or repurposed. Look for a Rediscovered Wood Certification label.
- Glues should be nontoxic. Ask about the kind of glue used.

What makes a fabric sustainable?

- It is made of natural organic or natural regenerative material. Linen is the easiest sustainable fabric to find. Cotton can be tricky; it can be one of the most polluting fabrics you can buy because of chemicals added. Be sure the company uses organic cotton.
- It contains repurposed fibers (soda bottles).
- It is made locally or in this country, which is getting harder to find because of reduced domestic production. Ask where the fabric was manufactured.

Sources: Jobi Blachy, EF+LM Pure Sustainable Luxury and Jackie Hirschhau, American Home Furnishings Alliance, planetgreen.discovery.com.

— CHARLYNE VARKONYI SCHAUB

SPRING CLEANING

Trade nasty chemicals for natural ingredients

*CLEANING, FROM 1H

Unfortunately, finding an eco-friendly cleaner requires a little work because cleaning companies are not required to list all the ingredients in their products. Even if they do, it's easy to hide toxic secrets in their ingredients labeled "fragrance" or "scent." Here's what you need to look for in a truly eco-friendly cleaner:

Start with reading the label. Those companies that are truly using safer ingredients want you to know it. If the ingredient list is a bunch of chemicals you can't pronounce, it's probably not green.

Next, look for the government's "Design for the Environment" (DfE) logo. You can find it on hundreds of products, and it means the product only contains chemicals the Environmental Protection Agency believes are the safest in their

class. Method and Clorox's "Green Works" lines both carry the DfE logo.

But, not all green cleaners carry the seal. Seventh Generation products, for instance, opted not to put the government's environmental logo on their products, claiming they far outperform other government-approved green cleaners and are much safer for the



environment. In fact, Seventh Generation is one company actually pushing Congress for tougher toxic chemicals regulations.

Of course, you can't beat the cost of some basic green cleaners. White distilled vinegar, lemon juice and baking soda



won't harm the environment and mixed together or with some warm water are the most inexpensive all-purpose cleaners you can find. Just don't use vinegar on marble because it can damage it. For tough jobs like mold or toilet bowls, try Borax. It's a washing soda found

in the laundry aisle.

I'm often asked what I use at home. I use a lot of vinegar and baking soda but I also love the naturally safe and effective Shaklee Basic H2 concentrated product. Just a few drops mixed with water cleans just about anything. You can find it online at Shaklee.com.

The last thing you want to do when you deep clean is pollute the air inside your home. Using chemical-based cleaners may get rid of the dust and dirt, but you could be creating a whole other set of problems. So, do your part for your family and the planet and green up your cleaning routine.

Terri Bennett is an Earth scientist, syndicated columnist and mom. Send questions to terridoyourpart.com.

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