

It's easy being Green

Environmentally friendly remodels can be simple and stylish

By Jon Bell

So, you're planning a kitchen remodel and you have at least a basic idea of what you want to do: new floors, cabinets and countertops; fresh paint; new appliances; and a nice big window over the sink so that while you're conjuring up the evening's feast, you can watch the world go by.

Sounds simple enough and with remodels of all size and shape the absolute rage these days, there are resources aplenty to make your vision a reality.

But here's something else to consider: Why not take an environmentally friendly approach to your project?

Too costly, too complicated or just too plain crunchy for you?

Think again. In this day and age, remodeling the green way has fast become an easy, economical and highly stylish way to add a little environmental conscience to your home remodeling project.

"The green idea's been out there for a while, but we've started getting more requests for certain environmentally-friendly things," says Scott Jaworski, co-owner of Mosaik Design, a Portland design and remodel company. "The over-

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Jeff Metke,
Metke Remodeling and Woodworking, Inc.

all benefit is that you're being environmentally responsible, but you're still getting products out there that are durable.”

And, Jaworski adds, the greener options—in flooring, cabinets, windows and paint, for example—are just as “fresh” and “stylish” as any on the market today.

“There are just a lot of advantages to it,” he says.

So, before you choose toxic paints for your living room walls, before you opt to install unsustainable hardwood flooring, before you decide that those crusty old windows in your family room are just fine, take a look at some of the environmentally friendly options available. They might just leave you green with envy.

Floors

Compared with hardwood floors—which put heavy demands on forest resources—and chemically-engineered tiles and laminates, there are quite a few more environmentally friendly flooring options available for remodels these days.

“One thing I've been seeing a lot more of is a lot more linoleum,” says Tim Ahaus, marketing manager for Earth Advantage, a non-profit that works with remodelers and builders on energy efficiency and sustainability. “That old stuff from the '40s is coming back in style.”

That's a good thing for the green-minded, as true linoleum is

made from all-natural linseed oil, pine resins and sawdust. Linoleum also doesn't off-gas—that is, give off chemical fumes—or contain formaldehydes, as some flooring materials do.

Jeff Metke, owner and president of Metke Remodeling and Woodworking Inc., says his firm reclaimed old beams and had them milled into flooring for one project, and Jaworski says Mosaik has been using bamboo, which grows and matures in roughly three years, on many remodels.

“It's very sustainable because it grows so fast, and you're not cutting down square miles of forest to use it,” says Jaworski, whose firm installed bamboo flooring in the home they remodeled for the Home Builders Association's 2006 Tour of Remodeled Homes™.

Ahaus says he's also seen homeowners choose natural wool carpeting or varieties that are made from recycled 2-liter soda bottles. And he points out that many homeowners and remodelers also have chosen Trex Decking—a composite made from waste wood and recycled plastic bags—for their outdoor decks and railings.

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Photo: Courtesy: Missouri Design

This Martindale kitchen has Energy Star appliances; windows with energy-saving low-emissivity coatings; and low volatile organic compound (VOC) paint.

Paint and Windows

Big on the green remodeling scene these days are low-volatile organic compound- or VOC - paints. VOCs are toxic substances found in many varieties of indoor and outdoor paint.

Paints and finishes that are high in VOCs often release toxic emissions long after they've been applied. Now, however, many manufacturers are producing paints with lower levels of VOCs, which are better for the environment—and for you.

Ahaus says these greener paints are often comparable in price and quality to those with higher VOC levels.

He also says replacing old windows with newer, more efficient models is one of the more popular green upgrades people are making through their remodels. Ahaus suggests looking for vinyl windows with a U-value (a measure

of heat transmission) of .35 or less. Multiple-paned windows filled with argon gas go a step further in adding even more efficiency.

"Replacing windows is a very simple thing," Ahaus says. "In almost every remodel we see, that's being done."

Kitchen and Bathroom

Among the most popular remodels, kitchens and bathrooms can incorporate a range of products and techniques to make them more environmentally friendly after a remodel.

For starters, the aforementioned flooring options fit well in either room. New cabinetry lines that utilize wheatboard—created by compressing straw and wheat left over from harvest into a composite board—are now available, and natural products, from stone to recycled quartz, are readily



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accessible for use on countertops.

In the bathroom, low-water toilets, showerheads and aerating faucets can all help save water, and upgrading to more efficient appliances in the kitchen can help save energy.

Heating, Cooling and Appliances

And speaking of energy, with costs on the rise, many consumers are looking for ways to conserve through their remodeling projects. What could be greener than that?

In the kitchen and elsewhere, for example, Ahaus says its best to replace older appliances with new ones that carry the Energy Star label. Appliances such as convection ovens, front-loading washers and dryers, and gas or solar-powered water heaters can all help save energy and money.

On top of appliances, Metke says that from an energy standpoint, not only can consumers replace older furnaces with newer, more efficient ones, but also there's been a shift from forced-air to radiant heat. One remodeling project Metke's firm completed included a gas-fired, high efficiency boiler that heats water and circulates it through tubes underneath the floors.

Add in a high quality, environmentally friendly insulation such as Icynene, and new, tightly-sealed wood or vinyl windows, and the savings will be more than noticeable.

"All these tactics can be a sizeable up-front investment, but they will yield long-term savings in energy use and can potentially qualify for tax rebates as well," Metke says.

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The stylish wooden floors in this home car showroom were made from reclaimed beams that have been milled into floorboards. The room is also heated by radiant heat provided by an efficient boiler located in the lower level.

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That's right. Many appliance and HVAC upgrades are eligible for tax credits and cash incentives.

"We have incentives for all kinds of energy efficiency," says Diane Ferington, manager of residential programs for Energy Trust of Oregon, an organization dedicated to energy efficiency and renewable energy. Among the incentives available through the Energy Trust are those for qualifying: insulation, window, duct and furnace upgrades; solar energy systems; clothes washers; and compact fluorescent light bulbs.

Green Remodeling Miscellany

For just a few of the countless other green remodeling options out there, consider:

Reclaimed lumber

Old, solid wood can stand the

test of time, and reusing it prevents the harvest of new timber. In one remodel, completed by Neil Kelly Design, old high school bleachers were milled for use as wainscoting.

Recycled paper treated for use as fire-resistant insulation. "Finger-jointed" wood.

Essentially, strips of scrap wood joined together replace the need for larger, select pieces of wood.

Recycled materials.

Places such as the ReBuilding Center in North Portland carry tons, literally, of old lumber, doors, windows, cabinets, plumbing fixtures and other household components that can be refinished and reused with charm. The center also is a great place to recycle your own old building materials. Visit www.rebuildingcenter.org.

Check out these web sites:

Green materials, contractors, or just a few simple ways to make your remodel a little more environmentally friendly:

The Home Builders Association of Metropolitan is always a great place to start for any of your building or remodeling needs, including those with a greener hue: www.HomeBuildersPortland.org.

The City of Portland's Office of Sustainable Development offers a wealth of information on green building, energy conservation, sustainable technology and more. www.sustainableportland.org.

The Northwest Green Directory is a comprehensive listing of green building products and services in the Northwest: www.nwgreendirectory.com.

The Northwest EcoBuilding Guild is an association of builders, designers, homeowners, manufacturers and others committed to ecologically sustainable building: www.ecobuilding.org.

Find a list of energy efficient products and technologies that qualify for a tax credit at www.oregon.gov/energy;

Find incentive information at www.energytrust.org.



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