

interior design



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Image: Eco Collection
from Alternative Flooring

living for the future

Sustainable design is more than a passing phase, it's a necessity, and it's changing the way people think about their home environment.

By Francesca Warner and Anthony Wilks.

S

ustainable design is a popular term in the design world, so it's worth considering what it means. Quite literally, being sustainable means using the Earth's resources at a

renewable rate. When it comes to interiors, this involves creating spaces that you won't need to change too often. This can only happen if both the design and materials are durable, and the available space to its best advantage.

Interior Designers will say they've always been doing this, ever since the architect William Kent designed matching furniture and interiors for his elegant Palladian mansions in the early 18th century. In recent years, increasing environmental concern has added an extra layer. Consumers and designers are interested in using products that will not have a long-term ecological

impact. Materials must be sourced responsibly, and designs must incorporate renewable sources of power and energy-saving devices.

Sustainable wood

An integral part of the interior design process is the sourcing of materials such as wood, fabric, textiles, and paints; some with clearer sustainability ratings than others. Wood is one natural material with a fast growing and comprehensive certification system (see our guide "be good to wood"), meaning that when you buy, you can be sure that you are not encouraging illegal forestry practices. It's also worth making the effort to find manufacturers who design, build and sell their own furniture on site in the UK, and so be confident that what you buy leaves the smallest possible carbon footprint.

George Smith makes high-quality, FSC certified furniture at their factory in

Newcastle and actively supports the local economy by running an apprenticeship scheme for unskilled school leavers, helping to preserve traditional techniques such as joinery and upholstery. They hope their furniture will be passed on through generations and even offer a re-upholstery service that allows clients to keep their frames but update fabric and filling, and so avoid the rapid turnover of 'disposable' furniture encouraged by larger manufacturers.

Making furniture that lasts also means creating designs that won't go out of date. Chris Sharp, owner of Chris Sharp Cabinets in Lincolnshire, deliberately designs furniture that isn't too cubic. "Lots of high fashion is very square and box-like" he says, "often steel mixed with wood, the sort of thing that will date. It's not cost effective to keep up with fashion." Sharp hopes that green pressures will make people think more long term, but worries that "sustainability"

could simply be a fad. "The pressure at the moment is to look sustainable, rather than actually be sustainable. We want more integrity than that."

Recycle and Re-use

The recycling of materials and furniture is not only the basis of sustainable living, but the key to creating personalised living spaces. Georgia Bulmer of Atlantic Interior Design observes an increasing focus on details and objects that reflect a client's personality. "As interior designers we scour the market and source the individual, unique piece. It's not about what's the latest and what's the best. Our clients don't want what other people have." One way of doing this is to use local recycling networks, such as feecycle.com, which allows you to find out what your neighbours are thinking of throwing away.

Thinking sustainably pushes people to look beyond their own four walls, as they search beyond the big department stores for ideas and influences and think more carefully about how their lifestyle affects the world at large. Interior designer Matteo Bianchi of Daruma Design, says we should embrace sustainability as it encourages innovation and creativity. A good example of this is smileplastics (www.smile-plastics.co.uk), who create one-off, individual pieces from melting down old plastic products from wellington boots to mobile phones.

This creativity brings new textures and fabrics into the home. Materials used by Alternative Flooring include coir, wool, jute, seagrass and sisal. Lorna High, Marketing Manager at Alternative Flooring, says they pride themselves on "providing consumers with stylish, contemporary flooring which is both ethical and environmentally friendly. Our unique Eco Collection has the official International Oeko-tex certificate, which tests for harmful substances. The two designs are hand woven on traditional looms. Nature velvet is smooth while Nurture loop style is textured."

Utilities and electrical appliances

Kitchens provide the best opportunity for blending design with energy efficiency. Customers are looking for multi-functional appliances that can be housed discreetly in the workplace and are more responsive to the problems of food wastage and energy efficiency. Jon Rossby, Managing Director of John Lewis of Hungerford, has found that American style fridges are getting less popular, in favour of more efficient models



that can make electricity bill savings of up to 60%. Sub-Zero now offers a refrigerator/freezer featuring a dual compressor system which enables each compartment to operate independently. Energy is saved as temperature levels within each compartment remain stable whilst another section is being used. With energy prices remaining unpredictable, such devices are a valuable investment.

Be good to wood

- Try to buy wood sourced from Europe as generally it is certified as sustainable.
- Look for the PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes) logo and the FSC logo which certify that the timber was replaced after it was harvested and that the ecosystem or any native way of life were unharmed by the logging process.
- Beware of endangered wood species such as murban, sapdee, wenge, ebony, Brazilian mahogany and teak, and Burmese teak.
- Choose wood products that do not have a petroleum base, as they release more toxic gases during manufacture.

GREEN ALL OVER

Warren Evans is undoubtedly the greenest bed maker in the UK, with 30 years' experience in making handcrafted, beautiful wooden beds out of FSC registered wood. They guarantee that every stage of the bed-buying process will be green, something which few other companies can offer. This dedication starts with the production of the bed exclusively from wood from renewable resources. The bed is then wrapped in reusable blankets, rather than cardboard and plastic, for transportation, minimising unnecessary waste. Warren Evans even promises to take your old bed away as part of the deal. In recognition of these efforts, the company has received numerous awards for ethical business, including the Sunday Times 'Best Green Companies Award' and a BCE Environmental Leadership Award. Most recently it has won the 'Local Retail Category' of the Observer Ethical awards, something about which Zoe Robinson, the sustainable development manager, is incredibly proud: "After embarking on this ethical mission, it's important for us to have independent verification that we're doing what we say we're doing. It's now onwards and upwards for us, and we'll keep on working at getting greener."

www.warrenevans.com

MAKING FURNITURE TO LAST

Chris Sharp doesn't make throw-away furniture. From his point of view, if you're making a bed or bookshelves out of a tree that has taken 150 years to grow, the piece of furniture should last at least half that long, preferably more. For 23 years Chris Sharp Cabinets has been manufacturing high quality furniture from solid wood. All their oak is bought directly from the saw mills in France, and carries the Pan-European Forestry Certificate. The full range has also recently been made available in cherry and walnut. For the last 2 years, Chris has been selling his furniture directly, cutting out the middleman, and focusing on customers through his website, which now accounts for 90% of his business. See Chris Sharp's range yourself at www.chrissharpcabinets.co.uk.

Images: Blanchard, BIDA Member
www.blanchard.uk.com
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