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Putting the Eco in Décor

The designer of Atlanta's EcoManor proves that green design can be beautiful

Story by Jillian Pritchard Cooke

A living room at EcoManor, Rutherford and Laura Turner Seydel's LEED-certified home, the first in the Southeast.

Until recently, the term "eco" was synonymous with a bohemian lifestyle, limited to embracing products that fell under the general category of "granola." Going "green" was not fashion-forward. But times have changed and so has interior design; today, green is no longer a trend but a growing requisite for today's cutting-edge designers—and companies have taken notice, lining shelves with green products in keeping with the guidelines national organizations have set for eco-friendly buildings.

But don't let all the information overwhelm you. Whether you are building, remodeling or even refurbishing your home, putting the "eco" in décor does not have to be a difficult process. There are simple ways to introduce healthy and respectful products into your home that may eventually pave the way for a complete eco-friendly makeover.

Buying from local vendors helps keep fossil fuels from being burned through an unnecessary shipping process, and it promotes finding unique and creative alternatives for your home. Atlanta has fantastic resources to help your home sit a little lighter upon the Earth—and put the "eco" in your fabulous décor.

Jillian Pritchard Cooke

Cooke offers simple ways to integrate eco-friendly products into your home:

PAINT. Until recently, paints and finishes were manufactured with a variety of solvents called VOC (volatile organic compounds), which release low-level toxic emissions into the air, causing headaches, nausea, and lung irritation. Low- or no-VOC paints and stains promote healthy living, allowing vibrantly colored walls without headaches and respiratory problems.

CARPETING. One of the biggest challenges when building green is carpeting. Most is manufactured with toxic chemicals, and about 5 billion pounds end up in landfills each year. Invest in companies like Glen Eden's Natural Elements, which manufactures 100 percent natural carpeting, or Mohawk and Interface, which have begun recycling initiatives. Consider flooring alternatives: Marmoleum (themarmoleumstore.com) is a formaldehyde-free version of linoleum.

LIGHTING. Switch common incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent light bulbs. CFL's cut energy usage by 60% and can last up to 10 years. Utilize vendors like Iron Design to create custom light fixtures made from recycled or reclaimed materials.

APPLIANCES. Upgrade to Energy Star appliances such as Bosch Thermador. This rating ensures the maximum in energy efficiency, cutting monthly energy bill costs.

FABRICS. Stay away from fabrics with synthetic, toxic content. Use 100 percent natural, sustainable fibers like wool, bamboo, cotton, silk and jute.

FURNITURE. Slipcover your sofa with 100 percent natural fabric instead of buying new; you will keep your old sofa out of an already crowded landfill. Visit antique stores or find creative ways to reuse existing pieces. Buy from local vendors, keeping unnecessary fossil fuel from being burned in the shipping process. When buying new furniture, make sure it is made from sustainable resources.

A forerunner in eco-sensitive design, interior designer Jillian Pritchard Cooke is president of Atlanta-based DES-SYN. She is slated to speak at the 2007 National Association of Home Builder's Green Building Conference this month in St. Louis, Missouri. For more information, visit des-syn.com.

For more of Jillian's eco-friendly tips, visit atlantahomesmag.com.