



Sticks and
Stones

cabinets
counter top
backsplash

ECO-FRIENDLY INTERIORS

HOME DESIGN GOES GREEN, TOO

BY ERIC VAN METER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMY HASKELL

Most people are familiar with the concept of “green” when it comes to home building and utilities—building with straw bale or rammed earth, orienting a home to minimize the impact of the blazing Tucson sun, equipping a home with solar panels to make the most of that relentless sun, and setting up systems for harvesting rain or using gray water for irrigation.

It’s true that incorporating these elements into the planning and construction of your home yields the most energy efficiency and the highest marks on eco-friendliness. But today’s green design concepts apply just as much to interior design and home improvement—from floors to ceilings, windows, and walls. And with more innovative materials hitting the market every month, going green isn’t just smarter and safer—it’s sexier than ever.

Standing on solid ground: green flooring

If you’re starting your design project from the ground up, traditional flooring presents a host of issues: synthetic linoleum or carpets that emit harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs), traditional woods that take years or decades to reforest, and concrete or tiles that use virgin materials as landfills overflow with glass, plastic, and other items that could be recycled.

Bamboo, which is technically a grass, has become one of the most popular green materials for flooring, says Natasha Winnik, owner of Originate Natural



◀ With the help of Natasha Winnik of Originate, homeowner Asia Philbin chose green materials for her kitchen, including Plyboo bamboo cabinets, Richlite countertops made of recycled paper and resin, and Forbo Marmoleum flooring made with natural raw materials.



Building Materials Showroom in Tucson—which boasts one of the state’s most extensive selections of green design products. Bamboo grows rapidly and, when properly harvested, doesn’t need to be reforested—it grows back naturally. It’s both strong and flexible, stains evenly, and offers a naturally beautiful finish.

If you have your heart set on traditional woods, more and more companies offer oak, maple, teak, and other woods certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), a worldwide organization that evaluates every aspect of a company’s wood production, from environmentally responsible harvesting to delivery to consumers. Salvaged wood (from naturally felled trees) and reclaimed woods (preserved from old buildings or even old vinegar or olive tanks) also offer a green approach to traditional woods.

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For non-wood or woodlike floors, linoleum offers a natural alternative. What we know as linoleum today is actually vinyl produced with petrochemicals. Real linoleum, usurped by vinyl in the 60s and 70s, contains only natural and renewable materials such as cork flour and limestone. It’s produced with very little energy, lasts 40–50 years, and unlike vinyl products, its pattern runs throughout the product, so if you scratch or scrape it, you’re not left with an unsightly gray backing to look at.

If you have your heart set on carpet, look for natural wool carpets with hemp backing and VOC-free adhesives. And tile lovers, don’t despair. There’s a green way for you, as well. Many companies offer ceramic and other durable solid flooring that’s a boon to the world’s landfills, consisting of anywhere from 25% to 100% recycled glass.



Counter intelligence: green kitchens & baths

When it comes to work or storage surfaces in the kitchen and bathroom, you need to dig a little deeper to discern green from non-green. For example Corian, a product made by DuPont, emits few VOCs but is made using petroleum, which is a non-renewable resource. Granite is beautiful but non-renewable. Concrete production generates massive amounts of greenhouse gasses.

◀ Terra Green recycled glass tiles, limestone counters made of recycled glass and cement, and Wheatboard cabinets made of renewable wheat straw can be found in Philbin’s bathroom.

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Many plywood products offer a green alternative: Bamboo is a popular choice, but you can also find products made from wheat straw and sunflower seed husks as well as beautifully patterned plywood made from sorghum stalks. Several companies offer ceramic tiles made from recycled glass, and you can also buy slabs of terrazzo made with recycled glass. One company, Richlite, offers a non-porous, heat-resistant, extremely durable product made from recycled paper—a surface that's been used in restaurants for more than 40 years.



▲ Bamboo makes an excellent choice for cabinets; it's strong, flexible, and offers a natural finish.

Best seat in the house: green furnishings

When it comes to furniture, green options tend to be fewer, says Tamara Scott-Anderson, owner of Contents Interiors: "The biggest push so far is using recycled or reclaimed wood." Some of the products she carries are made of teak reclaimed from old buildings in Brazil and shipped to Java, where it's assembled and

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carved into ornate dressers and tables. Another designer salvages massive wooden wheels and cogs from old sugar mills in Peru, turning them into decorative coffee tables and occasionals. "They're also using all kinds of things that grow rapidly," Scott-Anderson notes: sea grass, palm trees, even coconut shells.



Reclaimed teak table by Jason Scott. Available at Contents Interiors.

This buffet, table, and chairs from Environments are made of recycled Peroba wood. Available at Contents Interiors.

