

## Greener Pastures

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Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions From Your Home - The fact that our everyday lifestyles have a direct impact on our environment is now common knowledge. But it's perhaps less widely understood that our homes, and the way we use them, make a significant contribution to global warming and pollution.

"Greener Pastures for Homebuilders? A Survey of Sustainable Practices in the Homebuilding Industry," by the Calvert Group and the Boston College Institute for Responsible Investment, reports that the energy consumption of homes accounts for about 18% of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. It is clear that energy efficiency should be high on the agenda of anyone aiming to cut down on their emissions.

In addition to the problems related to climate change, medical experts are increasingly pointing to buildings, and the products we put in them, as being the primary culprits that cause or contribute to respiratory illnesses such as asthma. We introduce a myriad of chemicals into our homes whose health effects are questionable: off-gassing paints and adhesives, plasticisers in vinyl, brominated flame retardants, fluoropolymers used in wiring, not to mention household cleaning products. The concentration of these chemicals can reach levels five times those found outdoors. In specifying green products, we aim to cut out these potentially harmful materials — a green home should be safer and healthier to live in than a conventional one. For those leaning towards greener interiors, whether it's a new home or an existing remodel, there are now many safer alternatives to conventional building products.

### Low VOC Paints

Benjamin Moore's eco-friendly Natura paint gives an odourless, zero-VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) option with performance comparable to traditional paints. Natura promises easy application as well as outstanding durability. It dries fast and is highly washable days after it's been applied. The Natura range includes a primer plus three sheens: flat, eggshell and semi-gloss and, of course, an infinite selection of colours. Another readily available product on the market is Dulux Lifemaster, manufactured by ICI Paints. Lifemaster also contains no VOCs and is a low-odour paint. This super adhering, stain and oil resistant series of paints is ideal for every interior application.

### Flooring

Recycled, stone, clay and salvaged tiles will outlive most, if not all other types of flooring. Tile resists scratching and is fire-resistant, and because it's so durable, you'll save money over the long haul by not having to replace it. Tile is easy to clean and won't release unpleasant odours like some carpet or vinyl flooring products. Another advantage is that tile doesn't harbour potentially harmful mould spores, pollen, dust or dust mites. Recycled tiles and salvaged tiles have the extra bonus of saving on raw materials—they cut down on the mining of clay, stone, marble and other minerals needed to make conventional tiles. Well known manufacturers such as Crossville, Covering ECT, Terra Green Ceramics and Eco Cycle Glass produce tiles that contain 50% to 100% in-house manufacturing by-products—waste that would otherwise have ended up in the landfill. So, whilst enjoying extra durability and health, you're also helping save the Earth for future generations.

Another non-traditional tile product is Terrazzo. Made with 80% recycled content and a cement binder, this product includes recycled glass chips, granite and marble, and can create a beautiful, durable and affordable surface choice for floors, countertops and even wash basins.

Other green flooring options are rubber, cork and linoleum, used in sheet or tile, and all made from natural materials. Marmoleum is a well known product with a wide choice of patterns and colours.

Concrete flooring is another popular choice. It can be cheap and potentially eco-friendly, depending on the concrete mix and type of finish.

### Millwork

With a variety of wood suppliers on the market claiming green products, Smith & Fong's Plyboo bamboo material is a beautiful, emissions-free alternative to pressed-wood products containing glues with toxic formaldehyde. This bamboo material can be cut and stained just like regular plywood, and has the added advantage of coming from a fast-growing, renewable resource. It has become an international commodity in various forms of strip flooring, wall panels, cabinetry and furniture. If your project calls for the true look of wood, manufacturers are marketing certified millwork products which are verified by a third party as originating from well-managed forests. Manufacturers recognize the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards as the most rigorous and the only certification system with a well established chain of certification. To make certain that you get environmentally responsible wood products for your project, be sure to

emphasise your requirement for FSC-certified wood with a verifiable chain of custody.

Many homeowners, contractors and designers are going the extra mile to research and purchase environmentally responsible interior design products. Living in a home that includes these products makes the home and the planet a safer, healthier place to live. It doesn't necessarily cost more to design and build in an eco-friendly way, and you can save on maintenance costs. Designers and builders alike are making headway in this field; many items once seen as expensive and specialized are now made by well-known brands and are readily available and affordable. Innovative design and careful sourcing of materials at the beginning of a design project can save you money, health and time, not to mention the planet.

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