

Light Housework *and* Home Work

BY JOHN IMES

Lighting your way to greener living

“Making green sense” at home is something you can do even if you’re not carrying out a major building or remodeling project. Smaller projects such as installing lighting, selecting flooring or painting a room can be done in a green way as well. Deciding which measures are best to use can sometimes be a challenge. Fortunately, the Green Built Home™ program offers comprehensive tools and resources to help you make decisions that can save money, improve your family’s health, safety and comfort, and allow you to become a responsible steward of the environment.

In this issue, we’ll highlight green building priorities related to lighting design and product and material selection for creating a home office. These simple ideas and strategies will help light your way to greener living this holiday season!

Energy-efficient lighting

Lighting accounts for about one-third of a typical household’s electricity use, costing the average family nearly \$500 dollars per year and generating more than 8,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions. Good lighting is essential not only to the quality, look and function of room, but your home’s environmental performance as well.

Consider alternatives to conventional incandescent lighting:

- Natural light is not only beautiful, it’s free! ENERGY STAR-qualified windows and skylights can help you efficiently bring in lots of natural light.
- Compact fluorescent bulbs, fixtures and lamps can be used almost anywhere you would use incandescent, last 10 times as

long, and use 50 to 70 percent less energy.

- LED is the newest lighting technology being developed for residential applications and promises six times more light output per watt than incandescent bulbs and they last up to 50,000 hours or 50 times as long as standard light bulbs.

Creating a green home office

Selecting materials

Most green-building materials are neither difficult to find nor more expensive than conventional building materials. In many cases, these materials are available at your local hardware store, lumberyard or large home center chains.

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Herman Miller Mirra chair

Earth-friendly seating

- Sustainable design. The Herman Miller Mirra chair has a minimal number of parts and is easily disassembled for recycling; the recycled content is high, and it is 96 percent recyclable.
- Recyclable fabric. Latitude back upholstery is 100-percent recyclable.
- *Environmental Building News* magazine’s GreenSpec Product Directory named Herman Miller’s Mirra chair among its Top 10 picks for best new “green” products in 2003.
- The Mirra chair is the first Herman Miller product to be designed from beginning to end using the McDonough Braungart Cradle to Cradle Design Protocol, which Herman Miller’s Design for Environment Team utilizes as part of the company’s commitment to being a sustainable business.
- The chair is easy to take apart to recycle locally. Mirra contains no PVC.

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Make sure your new home office includes the following categories of green building materials that:

- Contain recycled content: A portion of product (or the entire product) is made with materials that might otherwise be bound for the landfill, such as carpet made from recycled milk jugs and soda bottles.
- Are durable: The product will last longer, require less maintenance and save money.
- Are made with renewable resources: The resource from which the material is made can be readily replenished, such as bamboo, which is used for flooring and can be harvested every three to six years.
- Are resource efficient: The product was designed to use fewer materials more efficiently, yet perform as well or better than standard products. For instance, engineered lumber is made from small-diameter lumber, resulting in a product stronger than standard wood.
- Are healthier: The products are non-toxic or have reduced chemical content compared to other products, including formaldehyde-free insulation and low-volatile organic compound (VOC) paints and finishes.
- Are locally produced: Long-distance transport of building materials can be very energy intensive.

Installing flooring

The best flooring material for your project is one that fits your budget and your aesthetics while protecting your health and the environment. Carpet, which harbors dirt, dust and other irritants, is generally not recommended because of its contribution to poor indoor quality. Carpet also typically releases chemical fumes, such as formaldehyde. Vinyl floors are not recommended because vinyl manufacturing is a major source of dioxin, a carcinogen. Additionally, if hardwood floors are to be installed, make sure that the wood comes from a sustainably managed operation and is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council or similar third-party organization.

Some flooring options:

- Cork is a soft, durable and resilient renewable resource

- Bamboo is a durable material that grows rapidly
- Natural linoleum is a product that is made from natural, renewable materials
- Natural materials carpet is a durable carpet made from natural materials like wool that don't release harmful chemicals



AFM Safecoat paint is VOC-free and free from toxic chemicals.

Painting a room

Paint is one of the biggest contributors to poor indoor air quality (IAQ). Standard paints and finishes typically contain numerous chemicals, such as formaldehyde, mercury, benzene and occasionally lead and chromium. The release of chemicals is highest when paint is wet and decreases as it dries, although some compounds can be absorbed into the painted material or fabrics and then released over an extended time. Additionally, this combination of chemicals releases VOCs that can produce physical problems, especially for individuals sensitive to chemicals. Fortunately, there are many alternatives to standard paints and finishes that can make your home healthier.

When shopping for paint, consider the following:

- Low- or no-VOC paints can be purchased at many major retail stores. However, even paints labeled “VOC-free” may still contain trace amounts of VOCs and toxic chemicals
- “Natural” paints contain no toxic chemicals, although especially sensitive individuals may still be irritated

- “Old-Fashioned Milk Paint,” routinely used in hospitals and schools, is made from milk protein (casein)
- AFM Safecoat paint is VOC-free and free from toxic chemicals

Selecting office equipment

Office equipment that has earned the ENERGY STAR logo helps eliminate wasted energy through special power management features. When equipment is not in use, it automatically enters a low-power “sleep” mode. An ENERGY STAR-qualified computer in sleep mode consumes about 80 percent less electricity than it does in full-power mode. Overall, ENERGY STAR-qualified office products use about half the electricity of standard equipment. Using less energy keeps utility costs down. In 2003, ENERGY STAR-qualified home office equipment saved Americans more than \$3.5 billion in energy costs. When shopping for office equipment, look for the ENERGY STAR label. ■

Green-it-yourself resources

- Use the Green Built Home program and online resources. Green Built Home offers new home and remodeling checklists, the “Project Guide” outlining environmentally responsible solutions for nine common building and remodeling projects, and the “Buyers Guide” that lists the top 10 priorities for incorporating environmental responsibility into your home. www.greenbuilthome.org
- The ENERGY STAR program sets performance standards for lighting, home electronics and office equipment and maintains a database of qualified products. www.energystar.gov
- Eco-Friendly Flooring is a wholesale supplier and installation contract for sustainable flooring products. www.ecofriendlyflooring.com
- AFM Safecoat provides a complete range of chemically responsible paints and finishes. www.afmsafecoat.com