



ECOSTYLE

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Interior design in the green market world is about healthy settings with visual appeal. The goal is to create rooms for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual benefits. That means avoiding things like airborne allergens, chemicals, and clutter. Because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ranks indoor pollution as one of the top five environmental risks to public health, interior designers have exceptional opportunities.

The study of indoor air pollution can get complex. Professionals who cater to sustainable and healthy living must be aware of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These are chemical compounds that evaporate in room temperature and contain one or more carbon atoms. Formaldehyde is the most common VOC that pollutes homes and offices.

Formaldehyde is found in insulation, glues, binders, fabric finishes, flooring materials, vinyl, plastics, fire retardants, wood composites, and especially gloss-type paints. Each product may meet acceptable standards, but who is measuring total VOCs in a single room?

LEED rating systems developed by the U.S. Green Building Council are helpful, but their focus is certifying buildings and spaces — not the materials that are used to construct them. There is, however, new pilot testing today called the LEED for Homes Rating

System. Yet it is based on the success of their commercial building standards and therefore measuring acceptable VOCs in a furnished room continues to be a challenge.

The National Association of Home Builders launched their Green Home Building voluntary guidelines in January 2005. They sponsored a green building conference in Atlanta last March where environmental issues were emphasized from the start. Included were standards for indoor air quality, the use of household chemicals, and even high-maintenance pesticide lawns. Those issues were addressed in addition to the usual energy efficiency, recycling, and water conservation concerns. They really established a more holistic and realistic approach to designing green homes.

ASID, the American Society of Interior Designers, has a Sustainable Design Council to aid designers in obtaining reliable information and creating standards. Facts about VOCs and formaldehyde are available on their web site www.asid.org. Individuals and businesses are both able to benefit from reading their research.

Of course all this research is advantageous to the green market, but let's keep facts as simple as possible for consumers. Educated small business owners are their own experts. It's up to them to reduce the data into information their clients have the desire to notice. Eliminating fear with a sound guarantee is key. Offer goods assembled from nontoxic ingredients and have the manufacturer's guarantee, spec or OSHA report on hand.

As our green market expands, designers are faced with an overwhelming array of new products. It's more burdensome work without industry standards, but each business is capable of creating their own. Big business may get the word out better due to their financial resources, but it is actually easier for the small interior design busi-

ness to serve this niche today.

Professionals need to analyze finishes on natural materials as well as synthetics made from recycled materials. Claims of being green, natural, earth friendly, recycled, sustainable, etcetera, can be overstated and false. Hence we have the term green washing to describe frauds.

Knowing formaldehyde as the major issue of concern revives historical processes and aids with the development of new technologies. Current healthy trends are Fung Shui foundations, sensitive color applications, productive work and rest spaces, nature connections, and meditation areas.

Word is out on earth-based stains, nontoxic sealers, dust mite control, natural lighting, and organic indoor plants. We now know that natural wool, hemp, silk, seagrass, bamboo, cork, and other organic fibers are here for us. We have plant-based and low impact dyes, "clean" recycling, HEPA vacuums, and high-tech air filters. We are even rethinking social graces for those who suffer.

Designers may create a perfect plan with a perfect customer, but there will be visitors who bring in pollutants that range from toiletry residues to dry-cleaned clothes with PERC on them. Asking guests to remove their shoes is only one small initiative in the big picture.

Interior decorators hold a golden opportunity to expand or develop the desires of their sustainable lifestyle clients by networking with eco-minded manufacturers and artisans. If team efforts improve respect for the well being of others and enhance the community, all the better! □

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