

CUTTING-EDGE MATERIALS MEET TRADITIONAL DESIGN IN THIS

ECO-FRIENDLY KITCHEN

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Around the office of Eren Design and Remodel, they refer to the project as the Donald kitchen. Because the firm focuses on environmentally friendly products and processes, some people might worry that means only The Donald—as in Trump—can afford it.



Not so, says Janice Donald, owner of Eren Design and of the 1950s kitchen that her company revamped for a new century. Her own recent kitchen remodel serves as a learning project for the company and a showroom of new ideas for customers. Sustainability, the hottest concept in building, includes the use of materials that are recycled or easily re-created (e.g., wheat rather than rain-forest wood), that do not cause additional air pollution in manufacturing or installation, are nontoxic for the user, and reduce the use of power and water. Kelly Potter, the designer, says the overall cost of the Donald kitchen equals an upgrade of 10-15% over base costs. For instance, the Bertch brand cabinets used, built of recycled wood and nontoxic glues, cost about the same as cherry wood. "And they are gorgeous," she says.

Donald says that besides the cost, people considering green remodeling worry about what environmentally sustainable will mean in terms of appearance. "They think it might be weird-looking," says Donald. "Or they think it

will have an organic look-such as a straw bale kind of thing." Potter responds, "We have not compromised on design. Janice wanted a sophisticated look."

Eren Design has created a modern kitchen with soft, matte black countertops, subtle mint green and cream colors in the patterned Marmoleum floor and on the nontoxic painted walls, and stylish, energy-saving light fixtures. Light Composers, a Tucson company, used LED (light-emitting diodes) as well as compact fluorescent bulbs and a hightech control system that can turn itself off when not in use. "We wanted to showcase materials that are not yet widely used," says Donald. Blue jeans, old window screens, recycled bottles, and an old school in Connecticut contributed materials to the kitchen.

Although Donald and Potter wanted to use products that might be new to the consumer, they did not want to compromise on performance. They ran tests on countertops to ensure they performed well, and chose the new brand EcoTop. They eliminated some of the hottest new products because they simply did not hold up. Only sketchy statistics track the growth of green construction, particularly in remodeling projects. The Green Building Council and American Society of Interior Designers have established the Re-Green standards, but remodeling projects do not qualify for the LEED certifications given to commercial and whole-home building.

Regardless of whether customers are clamoring for sustainable remodeling, Donald believes it is the company's responsibility to guide customers toward environmentally friendly design. "One of the values of the company is to do things that last. We build to last so that things do not wind up in the dump. We want to use a product that does not have to be replaced in five years," Janice says. She adds, "We want to include a knowledge base of products that are friendly to the environment. This (the kitchen remodel) has been a learning experience for us."

Since the emphasis on green building has grown faster in the Northwest than in the Southwest, Donald traveled to California to begin her education. "I went to West Coast Green, a meeting for environmental builders." She was impressed with the presenters. "The speakers were not new to this and did not make me feel bad that I was." Next, she and Potter searched the Internet for green products and the companies that made them. Besides the look and cost of the new materials, other considerations included transportation costs (to the environment as well as the pocketbook), and the environmental ethics of the companies they dealt with. And of course, since this is a remodeling company, they had to think about what happens to the old materials.

Although about half of the products used in the kitchen project came from out of state, Donald set a limit on how far away they would go to find what they needed. Drawing the line at the Mississippi River meant less greenhouse gas created by trucking products in. Local company Originate Natural Building Materials Showroom supplies the widest range of environmentally friendly building products, Donald says. Other companies, such as Fractured Earth, supplied the Oceanside glass tiles, and sell some other green products. Bonded Logic, a Chandler firm, created the insulation made of "post-industrial denim and cotton fibers" that looks a lot like shredded blue jeans. Not only does the material reuse old products, it does not drive the installers crazy with itchy fiberglass.

When considering environmental ethics of companies, Donald and Potter looked at new companies founded in response to increasing interest in these products, but also at older companies that have been quietly joining the sustainable revolution. For instance, widely used house paints create some of the worst violations of environmentally friendly standards because of toxic emissions. So it is comforting to know that a familiar company such as Dunn Edwards not only carries VOC-free paint but also recycles 95% of the waste streams from their factories.

Finishing up with energy-efficient appliances, lighting fixtures, and an on-demand water heater solves the most egregious environmental problem created by poorly designed kitchens-energy waste. And after materials are removed, "We send torn-out items to Restore here in town," says Donald. "They collect things to go to organizations such as Habitat for Humanity. Or we use parts of it in our new design." Bits and pieces from the old kitchen turned up in base moldings and window casings.

Janice Donald's company created a showcase for green remodeling in order to present sustainable remodeling as a viable option that is cost-effective, uses good design, and provides Janice a place to cook up breakfast along with more good ideas.

Vera Marie Badertscher is a Tucson freelance writer who now wants to remodel her kitchen.

Eren Design and Remodel 885-2500, www.erenesign.com

RESOURCES

appliances: Ferguson Bath Kitchen & Lighting Gallery, 575-7320, www.ferguson.com • **backsplash decorative inserts:** Fractured Earth, 620-6219 • **backsplash tile:** Originate Natural Building Material Showroom, 792-4207, www.originate-nbm.com • **cabinet hardware:** Eleek Inc., www.eleekinc.com • **cabinets:** Bertch Cabinet Manufacturing, www.bertch.com • **countertop:** Eco-top, www.kliptech.com/ecotop • **countertop installation:** Spectrum Stone, 795-4072 • **flooring installation:** Certified Floor Covering Installations, 661-6811 • **flooring materials:** Originate Natural Building Material Showroom, 792-4207, www.originatenbm.com • **island countertop:** Craft-Art Wood Countertops, www.craft-art.com • **lighting:** Light Composers, 797-0070, www.lightcompose.com • **natural fiber insulation:** Preston Insulation, 623-5423, www.prestoninsulation.com • **paint:** Dunn-Edwards, www.dunnedwards.com • **painting:** Cutting Edge Coating, 790-8773 • **windows:** Pella Windows & Doors, web.pella.com