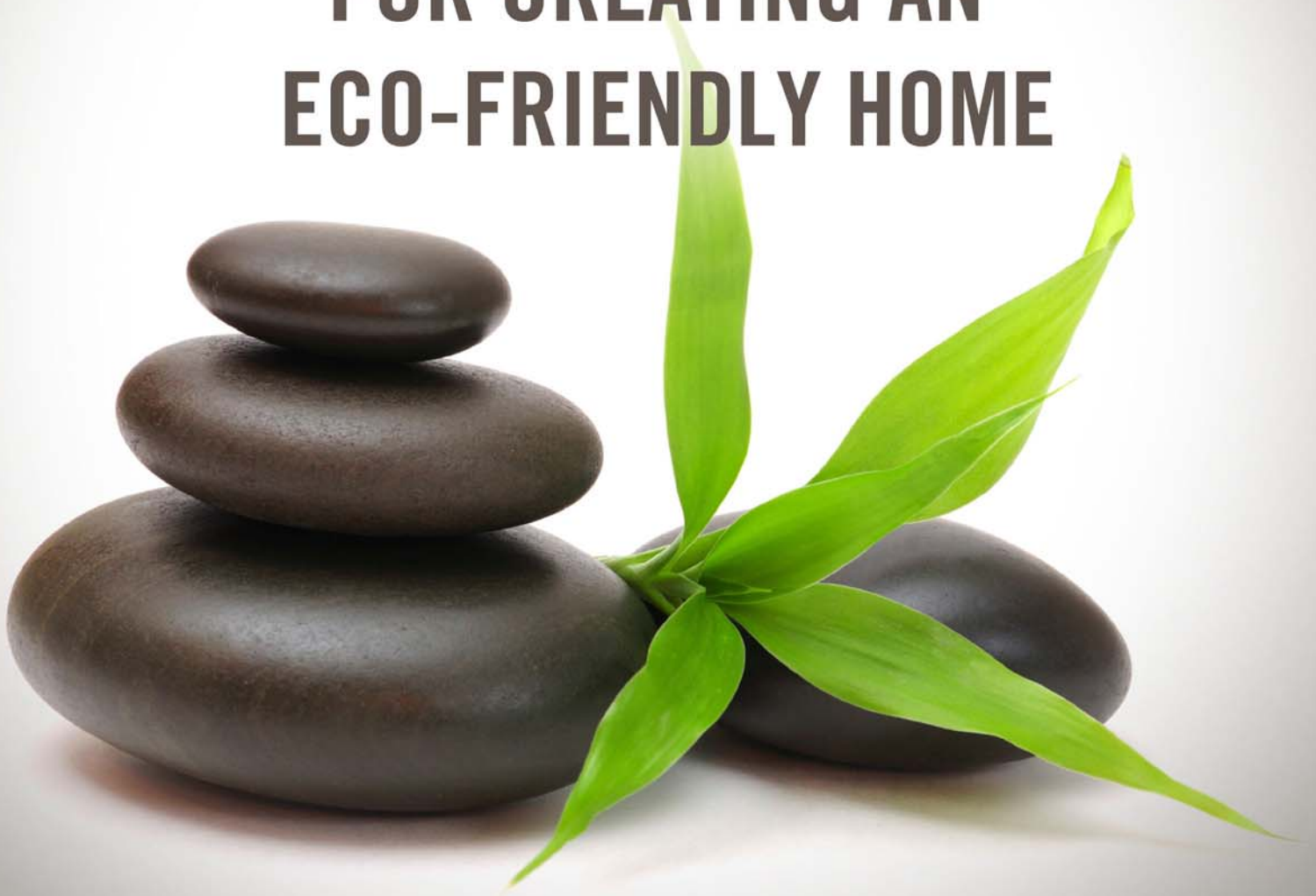


LIVING GREEN

12 SIMPLE STEPS FOR CREATING AN ECO-FRIENDLY HOME



*by Karen Trubner-Kent
Harmony Design Studio*

Karen Trubner-Kent is the owner and principal designer of Harmony Design Studio, a high end interior design firm located in Redmond, Washington, that specializes in residential interiors.

As the principal designer, Karen approaches every project with the belief that:

- The environment we inhabit - how it looks and how it feels - has an enormous impact on our mood and productivity, and our sense of well-being.
- The furnishings, color palette and interior finishes of your home should be in harmony with your interests, your lifestyle, and the art and collectibles that fill your living space.
- Any design solution must serve to enhance the functional and aesthetic use of your space, while transforming your home into a place you truly love .

On every project, we have available a team of design professionals who are dedicated to their craft. The list includes vendors, showrooms, contractors and antique dealers. In addition, our custom designed furniture pieces are locally crafted by highly skilled artisans.

A graduate of Bellevue Community College and the University of Washington, where she received degrees in both Interior Design and Art History, Karen also attended the prestigious Sotheby's Decorative Arts Course in London, England, early in her career, and continues to keep up with current trends in art and antiques.



Here's the scenario: you've hired an interior designer to give you the home of your dreams but you're not sure what you want. As a designer myself, the one thing I would emphasize is a healthy, green environment along with a home you really love. Most clients I've worked with don't realize how easy it is to make your life less toxic and your environment come alive, just by emphasizing your health and well-being.

Why Green? In a nutshell, a Green home provides a healthier living environment for you and your family, because it can improve indoor air quality, reduce energy and water consumption, and also reduce household waste. Ultimately, living Green helps to conserve our natural resources and protect our ecosystem.

Most of us know we should 'Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle' yet beyond that, what else can you do? Compiled in this brochure, is a basic list to get you started. Keep in mind that, for most of us, this is a gradual process. It's best to start small. Do what feels right for you, your family, and the way you live, and realize that it may take time for all family members to get on board.

Below are my 12 simple, favorite tips for creating an eco-friendly home that is beautiful and healthy:

1. Buy Organic. Buy Locally Whenever Possible.

I use to think that buying organic food was just a fad and too expensive for my budget. That was a long time ago, before I had to deal with gluten intolerance and food allergies, and thus became a voracious reader of product labels. I've since learned that my health is worth the extra effort and the extra expense, and I've become very selective, buying organic when it makes the most sense.

While organic choices may not be realistic for all budgets, it's important to know that organic foods are grown in nutrient-rich soil, without added pesticides. It's OK to be selective and focus on the most highly contaminated produce, which includes strawberries, cherries, potatoes, tomatoes, apples and peaches, to name a few.



Be sure to support your local economy! Browse your neighborhood farmer's market to find sources grown nearby or better yet, try growing your own! Locally grown food and locally manufactured products are produced by many talented artisans. By supporting them, you can help reduce transportation costs and your carbon footprint.

2. Buy Quality Products

This may surprise you, but investing in a high quality, well-made product will protect the environment and in the long run, save you money.

How? Simply put, the well-made, custom sofa in your living room can easily outlast several generations of your family and eventually earn the status of 'antique'. Since quality products always lasts longer than inferior ones, this means you won't have to replace things as often. You will go through less 'stuff' which translates to less waste entering the landfills.



3. Cabinetry



Cabinetry is always a challenge. Should you replace your existing cabinets or refinish them? Perhaps you should re-purpose them in the laundry room or garage? If your budget allows for custom made cabinets, then you should definitely make the investment, but I would go a step further and select environmentally sustainable, non-toxic materials.

It's important to realize that the boxes of most cabinets, whether for the kitchen or bath, are made of standard particleboard that contains formaldehyde. (It's hidden in the adhesives). Cabinets can off-gas formaldehyde for up to five years, which can contribute to significant health problems.

For sustainable options, choose materials such as bamboo or lyptus, water-based finishes, and adhesives that do not contain formaldehyde.

4. Cleaning Supplies & Toiletries

Inviting beauty into your home extends to the bath, and all your cleaning supplies. After all, once you've made such smart choices as sustainable fabrics, and environmentally friendly wood for your flooring and cabinets, why would you maintain them with standard, toxic cleaning solutions?

This is a simple change to make, and one that is both kind to the environment, and your health. Make this a long-term goal and it will be easier on your budget; simply replace products with healthier options, as you run out.



To implement, switch out ALL your cleaning supplies for non-toxic options that are kind to the environment. This includes everything from dishwashing & laundry detergents, fabric softener, non-chlorine bleach and tub & tile cleaners, just to name a few. If you use an outside cleaning service, be consistent and ask them to clean your home with non-toxic products, as well.

In the bath, consider switching to natural, organic products in your choice of cleansers, shampoos and lotions. Look for products that are manufactured without parabens, phthalates or petroleum based compounds. Whether for the laundry, kitchen or bath, be sure to seek out products with minimal packaging, and/or packaging that can be recycled.

5. Energy Star Appliances



Perhaps you've seen the brightly colored Energy Star seal, while looking for a new refrigerator, or other appliance, and have wondered what it meant? The Energy Star label is a highly reliable stamp of approval that can be found on appliances in any price range. It is a system for rating appliances, in terms of their energy efficiency, which is a basic component of greening your home.

Does this mean you should immediately unload any existing appliances that don't meet these guidelines? As with everything else, it's OK to take it slow. If you've had the same dishwasher for thirty years, you can be sure it is guzzling both energy and water. That would be the item to replace first.

For optimal energy savings, always choose appliances that come with the Energy Star seal. For more information, visit energystar.gov for a range of options. In addition, you can do your part to reduce waste by contacting organizations that will either re-cycle, or donate, your old appliances.

6. Fabric

Do you have a plush sofa that you love to sink into at the end of the day? Or a favorite article of clothing, made of fabric that beckons to be touched?

Fabric is such a tactile experience! It would be quite understandable if your greatest concern regarding eco-friendly fibers is that they won't have the same soft feel, lustrous sheen, or warm, inviting colors as traditionally manufactured fabrics. Rest assured, that in today's marketplace, you can find a wonderful selection of beautiful, sustainable fabrics made by highly talented artisans. Keep in mind that by supporting these companies and their hand-made, custom creations, you also help support their artistry.



Look for organic fibers that use no synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, hormones or antibiotics at any point during the manufacturing process. Be aware that natural fibers such as cotton, silk, wool, bamboo or linen may or may not be organic. In other words, a fabric that is made of natural fibers, isn't necessarily 'green'—it depends on the manufacturing process and how it was grown.

7. Flooring

Who says environmental awareness has to be boring?

For the latest in fun, over-the-top choices, consider using carpet tiles! These tiles allow one to be highly creative. One of their best features is not having to replace the entire carpet due to damage—you only need to replace the affected tile. As an added bonus, some companies will even re-cycle used tiles—how beautiful is that?

Most rugs and carpets are full of chemicals, which will off-gas unhealthy fumes into your home. For healthier alternatives, seek out renewable, non-toxic, natural fibers such as sisal or jute, or even wool and silk, as long as they are biodegradable and have been responsibly manufactured. (See also: Fabrics)

Other top flooring choices include durable, renewable resources such as bamboo or cork (actually the bark of a tree), poured-in-place concrete, ceramic tiles, and even linoleum.

Embarking on a remodel? For added warmth underfoot, and increased energy efficiency, consider installing radiant heat floors. Check with your contractor to see which options are best for you.



8. Furniture



For a clients' family room remodel, the goal was to make the room warm and inviting, while using as many natural, environmentally friendly furnishings as possible. The end result was very successful, and proved that authentic materials combined with sustainable design can be beautiful and innovative, and highly compatible.

Even though the furniture industry is fraught with toxicity, designer showrooms abound with eco-friendly furniture options. It is quite possible for furniture to be beautiful without making you sick. For the frame, look for furniture made from Forest Stewardship Council certified wood, or wood purchased from sustainable and/or renewable resources, plus water-based veneers and paints, and adhesives that do not contain formaldehyde.

For cushions and padding, look for organic cotton batting, soy-based, natural foam latex or hypoallergenic down & feathers, and of course, sustainably grown and manufactured fabrics.

9. Household Linens

If you've ever been to a Spa or stayed at a luxury hotel, then you know what it feels like to sleep on high thread count sheets, and pamper yourself with plush towels.

Why not bring the Spa experience home with you and treat yourself to fine, organic linens in your Master Suite?

Conventional towels and linens are filled with harmful chemicals leftover from the manufacturing process. When you consider that these same linens are what you bury your face in when you sleep, or dry off with after



a shower, it's a bit of an 'icky' feeling. However, you can find plush, organic towels and luxurious bedding at fine bath boutiques everywhere. Your body will thank you for it.

10. Lighting

Dimming your lights conserves energy and is the smart thing to do!

Did you know that most homes have only one dimmer, and it is always in the same room, regardless of the house? Yes, you guessed it! The dining room holds this dubious distinction, but it doesn't have to be that way—any room in your home can benefit from adjustable dimmers, even the bath!

I always recommend reading lights with dimmers, because they allow one to dim the lights for watching TV, or increase the brightness for a task-oriented activity such as reading. An added bonus is that each family member can adjust the light to their own comfort level!



Lighting is often referred to as the jewelry in a room, because it can take a room from 'blah' to warm and inviting. Along with quality lighting design, I recommend that you upgrade further by replacing incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents (or CFL's), and use adjustable dimmers wherever possible.

11. Paint



On a recent project, while selecting paint colors for a client expecting their first-born, you can be sure I encouraged them to choose non-toxic paints! After all what could be more loving than providing a healthy, beautiful home for their baby to thrive?

We all know what fresh paint smells like, but that ‘fresh paint smell’ is what’s commonly referred to as ‘off-gassing’. It is not good for your lungs or your health. While traditional paints are highly toxic, there are a number of brands on the market, that offer non, or low, VOC’s—the Volatile Organic Compounds that are very harmful to your health.

Expect to pay more for these paints, but as with most sustainable products the long-term payoff is the benefit to your health.

What are these extra payoffs? Pricier paints typically have better coverage, which means you’ll need fewer coats of paint overall. Plus, you can re-paint your bedroom and sleep peacefully in your bed the very same night, knowing that the air you breathe is clean and healthy.

12. Remove Your Shoes

The Japanese have done this for centuries. I’ve tried it myself, and so can you. If you really want to protect your floors, and prevent dirt and outside toxins from being tracked into your house, then try this simple solution: provide an attractive mat that blends with your home’s décor and place it in a convenient location by the main entrance to your home.

Ask everyone to remove their shoes, and keep a comfy pair of slippers or ‘indoor’ shoes handy, to wear instead. What could be easier?



GREEN LINGO

Formaldehyde	A common ingredient in the adhesives used in building materials, believed to cause cancer in humans.
Recycle:	Taking used and discarded products to create something new.
Renewable:	A natural resource (bamboo, cork), or energy source (wind, sun) that can be replenished in a reasonable amount of time.
Sustainable:	A product that has zero impact on the environment
VOC's	Volatile Organic Compounds, refers to the toxins present in paints, carpets, cabinetry and adhesives, which produce off-gassing.