

# Greening your living room

You can eat organic, but can you decorate that way? **RACHEL GOTLIEB** investigates the eco-décor options

For some of us, the return of autumn's cool crisp days is just another excuse to go shopping. But with all the bad news about household allergens, electromagnetic fields and nasty chemicals, shopping for the home is more fraught than it used to be.

As if VOCs (volatile organic chemicals) weren't worrisome enough, the latest news on the home front is the presence of PBDEs (polybrominated diphenyl ethers). These are flame retardants widely used in the plastic casings of televisions and computers and in furniture upholstered with polyurethane foam.

It's enough to make you want to go green. But unlike the thriving organic-food industry, the home décor marketplace remains thin on green products. "It's the old chicken-and-egg dilemma of which comes first," says Martin Liefhebber, the architect who designed Toronto's famous solar-powered Healthy House.

If good green design was better distributed, Liefhebber argues, consumer demand would increase. Parents in particular, he says, want the best for their children. "They send them to the best schools; it's only rational that they would want to create the best and healthy home environment available."

In fact, Canada's commercial design industry is way ahead of the consumer marketplace. With higher government standards for commercial projects, there is money and demand for everything from reusable cubicle walls to recyclable office furniture. Databases such as Building for Environmental Economic Sustainability analyze building products, and architecture firms vie in the "Olympics" of eco-architecture, the LEED awards (for Leadership in Environmental Energy and Design), handed out by the U.S. Green Building Council.

At last week's IDEX-NeoCon, the Toronto-based design trade show, there was plenty of interest in the Greenlife showcase, an initiative that introduces eco-friendly products and materials. While some of the products are new, others, like Textra, a wall textile made in Sweden from recycled glass, have long been in use in European homes.

Lorraine Tierney, vice-president of marketing at IDEX-NeoCon, sees the showcase as an interim measure. While currently "there is the need to sift through" the latest information on sustainable materials, she believes environmental labelling will become standard.

Will the labels make a difference? Environment Canada certifies more than 1,400 products with its EcoLogo label, including appliances, cleaning products and building materials. Yanne Larosa, sales director at Interface Fabrics in Granby, Que., which produces environmental fabrics for the contract industry, believes consumers need to be educated about what's available. "I would love people to know about the great opportunities available for green products. If they knew, demand would increase."

On the other hand, he acknowledges that the consumer market is driven by fashion and price rather than ecology. "Unlike Europe, where they are living on top of each other and have no open spaces, North American consumers don't feel the pressure to change."

Alix Paterson sees it differently. The owner of a brand new eco-lifestyle emporium in Toronto's Yorkville, she calls herself part of the "next wave" — after the success of the organic food movement.

"It's not just the food you eat, it's the lifestyle," says Paterson, whose shop, called T.H.E. Store (the acronym stands for Total Home Environment), joins two successful locations in Vancouver. "Everything we sell is organic," she says, from the beeswax candles to the wool-filled cushions to the alpaca throws. She also carries sustainable bamboo flooring, and furniture made from reclaimed pine, making it "one-stop shopping."

The notion of lifestyle may be the key to growing the green home. According to Liefhebber, that giant of lifestyle retailing, Ikea, has been quietly conducting its own eco-testing. While initially the company introduced its own environmental label for some of the furniture, it has now dropped the distinction, instead working toward green design policies throughout its line.

Of course, buying quality furniture that is meant to last may be the smartest way to reduce pollution. After all, does the world really need another chair design?

Rachel Gotlieb is co-author of *Design in Canada*, which is now available in paperback.



The Cardero cabinet is available in Forest Council certified fir.



Ikea's Karlanda sofa is free of off-gassing chemicals.



Kirei board is made from waste sorghum stalks.



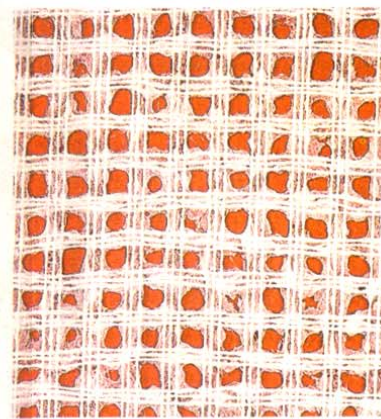
The Par lounge uses fast-growing liana vine.



Looolo textiles feature chemical-free Climatex wool.



Dema's Lips chair is made of recycled materials.



Textra glass textile (shown unpainted).

## Sustainable sources

### FLOORING

**Kirei board:** A new product that was getting plenty of interest at last week's IDEX-Neocon design show in Toronto, Kirei is made of discarded sorghum stalks (a byproduct of alcohol and molasses) and a non-toxic adhesive. It comes in different thicknesses and can be used for residential floors, wall, furniture and accessories. From \$10 a square foot through Octopus products (416-531-5051, [www.octopusproducts.com](http://www.octopusproducts.com)).

**Fuse:** Formerly known as Tekka, this is the only wood-flooring line in Canada to receive the EcoLogo from Environment Canada. It is made from recycled wood scraps, sustainable harvested wood or fast-growing tropical woods such as bamboo and can be laid right over concrete, eliminating the need for a subfloor. About \$7 a square foot through Floorworks in Toronto (416-961-6891) and Tapis Lipman in Montreal (514-737-5022).

### CARPETING

**Interface Flor collection:** From commercial carpet giant Interface, the residential Flor collection offers low-waste, easy-to-install carpet tiles, including some made of corn fibre. From \$13 a tile through Fos in Toronto (416-364-6877), or call 1-866-281-3567 ([www.interfaceflor.com](http://www.interfaceflor.com)).

**Vorwerk:** This German company makes carpets that have a hypoallergenic seal and uses recycled materials with low chemical content such as water-based dyes and non-adhesive glues. It has the Canadian EcoLogo and the Blue Angel from Germany ([www.vorwerk-carpet.com](http://www.vorwerk-carpet.com)). Available through Floorworks (416-961-6891).

**Woodnotes:** Made in Finland, Woodnotes is a line of carpeting and upholstery made from wood-based paper yarn that uses natural dyes and has been processed without chlorine ([www.woodnotes.fi](http://www.woodnotes.fi)). For Canadian retailers, e-mail [woodnotes@woodnotes.fi](mailto:woodnotes@woodnotes.fi).

### WALL AND CEILING

**Low-VOC paints:** Look for "green" paints such as Pittsburgh Paints' Pure Performance, which advertises zero VOCs and low odour ([www.pittsburghpaints.com](http://www.pittsburghpaints.com)).

**Textra glass textile:** A durable textured wall covering made in Sweden from sand and potato starch, Textra goes on like wallpaper but is meant to be painted. From 90 cents a square foot through Glass Textiles North America (1-888-724-4574 or [www.glasstextiles.com](http://www.glasstextiles.com)).

**Featherlite ceiling tiles:** Made from recycled glass and gypsum, these paintable two-foot-square tiles create a coffered ceiling that looks like wood. From \$10 a square foot through GTNA.

### FURNITURE

**Lips chair:** Designed by Piergiorgio Cazzaniga for Italy's Dema, the Lips line uses recycled Zebrano wood and carries the Casa Toscana Green Home certification label. From \$2,800 through Relative Space in Toronto (416-961-6891).

**Cardero cabinet:** Designed by Grant Wyllychuck for B.C.'s Ornamatum, this cabinet is available in Forest Stewardship Council-certified Douglas fir. \$3,850 through [www.ornamatum.bc.ca](http://www.ornamatum.bc.ca).

**Par Lounge:** Designed by Patty Johnson and Terence Cook, the Par Lounge seat is manufactured of liana, a fast-growing vine, by Linea Cane Interiors, a Guyana company that ensures equitable wages. Its steel legs are by Edmonton's Pure Design. For pricing and retailers, call 1-800-483-5643 or go to [www.pure-designonline.com](http://www.pure-designonline.com).

**Karlanda sofa:** Like many Ikea products, this sofa's upholstery is free of chemical toxins such as flame retardants. \$799 at Ikea ([www.ikea.ca](http://www.ikea.ca) or call 1-800-661-9807).

### CUSHIONS AND UPHOLSTERY

**Looolo Textiles:** Toronto's Joanna Notkin creates throws and pillows from chemical-free Climatex Lifecycle Wool. The pillows are filled with buckwheat. From about \$140 through [www.looolo.ca](http://www.looolo.ca).

**Terratex upholstery fabrics:** Made from recycled pop bottles, this hardwearing polyester is still mostly used in commercial settings, but residential applications include home theatres ([www.terratex.com](http://www.terratex.com)). For information, e-mail [yanne.larosa@interfacefabrics.com](mailto:yanne.larosa@interfacefabrics.com).

**T.H.E. Store:** An organic general store with locations in Vancouver and Toronto, it carries organic wool cushions and alpaca throws, as well as pure beeswax candles, non-toxic pottery and recycled pine furniture. For locations, call 1-604-688-5044 or visit [www.t.h.e-store.com](http://www.t.h.e-store.com).