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Going Green What does it Really Mean?

By Vivian Astroff

Photography by Gordon King and Kelsey Mercier
supplied by Denys Builds Designs and Deslaurier Custom Cabinets

The essence of green is more with less, and the results can be spectacular.

For award-winning industry veteran Paul Denys, going green is more than buying green-labeled products. It's a way of living and thinking.

"Being able to do more with less is the essence of building green," the versatile designer/renovator says.

Driven by this ideal, Denys has been pursuing environmentally sound ideas in renovation for more than 25 years. His company, Denys Builds Designs, specializes in "everything from modern renovations to historic restorations and often a unique fusion of the two."

Denys is a master of designing stunning small spaces, using natural light, well-chosen light fixtures and large mirrors to make small rooms seem much larger. He has renovated his own post-war, 500-square-foot bungalow, making ingenious use of space to comfortably house his family of three.

Carefully selected lighting and plumb-

ing fixtures mean less wasted water and electricity, he notes. He often uses halogen lights on dimmer switches because turning lights slowly on and off makes

"Greening may take five years to penetrate the industry"

the bulbs last 10 to 20 times longer.

Sometimes the best energy-saving technologies are from Europe where resource conservation is part of the culture. Denys likes German-made Hansgrohe shower heads and sink faucets because they make less water feel like more; while Duravit toilets flush more with less water.

Denys is well known for applying his fine craftsmanship to heritage homes in

Ottawa's ByWard Market area and was honoured by the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association and by the City of Ottawa for giving the old homes new distinction in their modern urban setting.

Steve Barkhouse is another seasoned renovator who has long been involved in energy efficient building. "We live by the slogan 'reduce, re-use and recycle' as much as possible, with the client's permission," he comments.

As the owner of Amsted Construction, he has captured top honours from the GOHBA for renovations with outstanding energy-conserving features.

Although Barkhouse says his clients show different levels of interest in green renovation, especially when comfort or costs are issues, he believes "a lot of this is common sense" and a well designed renovation can ultimately save clients' money.

"Green has to be designed into the proj-

Amsted's Steve Barkhouse won the GOHBA Green Project of the Year award in 2008 for his own renovated Kanata bungalow.



ect if you want to do a proper job of it,” he says.

His own renovated Kanata bungalow, for which he won the GOHBA Green Project of the Year award in 2008, includes upgraded windows and insulation, sunlight-capturing glass blocks, rain barrels for watering the garden, dual-flush toilets and a geothermal heating and cooling system. Heat pumped from pipes laid in the bedrock under the house warms household water for the family’s needs and feeds energy to a radiant floor heating system.

As a supplier to many renovators and home builders, Deslaurier Custom Cabinets has a major stake in keeping abreast of consumer demands for green products such as bamboo finishes..

The renovation has improved his home’s overall energy efficiency by over 32 per cent to a rating of 86, pushing it into the top five per cent of all Canadian homes, both new and old.

His company is currently rebuilding a small bungalow in central Ottawa using primarily recycled products and materials. When rebuilt on the original foundations, the house will be the first in Ottawa designed to a Platinum LEED standard, the highest standard attainable under Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design guidelines. “Every renovation

“ When a furnace is eight years old or more, it may be less than 90 per cent efficient ”

provides different opportunities,” he points out.

John Liptak, CEO of Oakwood Design and Build, believes that the demand for green technologies and materials in the building and renovating industries will double in the next few years, partly driven by their lower prices, which have already fallen dramatically from where they were even three years ago.

Oakwood is one the largest renovators in the region and Liptak says his staff is kept busy researching and sourcing new green building products in Canada, the United States and Europe.

Among the most common new products are no- and low-VOC paints. (VOCs are volatile organic compounds that emit toxic gases.) They used to demand



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Green bathrooms feature energy-saving fixtures and materials as featured in this one by Denys Builds Designs.



premium prices but now there are innovative Canadian brands for roughly the same price as quality non-green paints. A Quebec company, for example, manufactures water-based paints from recovered, unused domestic paints and stains, adding only one per cent of new material to the final product.

Some energy-wise features are still cost-prohibitive for most consumers. Liptak's own home has a pair of high-end geothermal heat pumps. Since these run about \$80-\$90,000 apiece, they are not within everyone's renovation budget, but

he points out that the new tankless hot water heating units are more affordable and a good energy-efficient alternative.

Electric floor heating is another technology often incorporated into renovations of older homes. When a furnace is eight years old or more, it may be less than 90 per cent efficient, so heat rising from the floor level can add comfort to the rooms.

With electric timers and controls, radiant floor mats laid under ceramic tiles are an extremely effective source of secondary heat, Liptak says. While the technol-

ogy has been refined in recent years, the price of electric floor heating has also fallen substantially, he adds.

In a renovation project Oakwood finished in January, the greening went far beyond obvious eco-friendly materials and features. The home's foundation walls are made of Durisol, a cement and wood fibre material formed into an insulated foundation system. Unlike traditional cement-block, the Durisol system does not depend on any foam or petroleum-based insulation. Plywood was used in the construction rather than particle boards to minimize glues, and finished woods were treated with water-based lacquers.

Liptak and his daughter, Patricia, sit on the Green Committee of the Renovators Council of the GOHBA, and the Canada Green Building Council, a national organization tasked with educating the industry's clients, partners in the trades and employees. These are important avenues for renovators to acquire new technical knowledge as well as for pushing the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standard for renovations and not just for new building, Liptak explains. But the process of greening is a gradual one that may take some five years "to really penetrate the renovations industry."

As a supplier to many renovators and

**“ People
don't know
what they are
buying ”**

some 30 home builders in the region, Deslaurier Custom Cabinets has a major stake in keeping abreast of trends and consumer demands. The company's website is clear about its environmental goals: "We're going green – from the facilities and processes, to the materials we use."

However, when you're a manufacturer talking green, there is also a dizzying

array of considerations. Deslaurier's president, Denis Staples, explains: "Unfortunately, there's no clear and precise definition as to what makes a product 'green' and as a result, people don't know what they are buying."

The point is echoed by Paul Denys who says, "It's a wild west out there with no single gold standard, no consensus." He points to some 250 certification bodies

and shipped long distances, making it not the ultimate in green. As well, very small amounts of radon have been found to be off-gassing from some granite, a problem that is difficult to detect and resolve.

Engineered stone countertops, made of 93 per cent crushed quartz combined with polymer resins and pigment, seem to be a great option. Quartz is an abundant natural, often crumbly rock, too brittle to



Conservation-minded renovators will often try to make better use of the existing space in a home rather than propose an expensive addition.

for "green," covering the range of materials to products and practices -- and they don't all work together.

For example, bamboo is a popular and attractive finish for cabinet doors as well as flooring because of its clean contemporary lines. On the surface it's a great candidate for the green list. In new construction, bamboo captures LEED points because unlike a tree that takes decades to reach full size, it's an abundant grass ready for harvest in eight years.

On the other hand, bamboo for manufactured products comes from Asia, hardly close to home if you're renovating a house in Ottawa. It must travel by long-distance transportation with unavoidable impacts on the environment in consuming and burning non-renewable fuel.

Attractive new eco-friendly kitchen and bathroom countertop materials are replacing traditional plastic laminates. Again, there's a lot more to each product than meets the eye. Granite is natural rock, but it has to be quarried from the earth

and used as slabs. So recycling industrial quartz waste keeps it out of landfills, but the processing to make the quartz into a countertop is very energy intensive. In addition, the resin binder is petroleum based, making the final product not green enough for some consumers.

Cabinet finishing can also be a conten-

"It's a wild west out there with no single gold standard, no consensus"

tious issue. The finishing of all cabinet components involves numerous stages, not obvious to consumers, that can disqualify an end-product from being truly "green," Staples points out. For instance, traditional solvent-based wood stain has

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LEAVE THE DUST BEHIND!

There are two voices to any argument.

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The other voice says think of renovation as a holiday, in perfect, clean, ordered comfort at The Arosa Residences in downtown Ottawa.

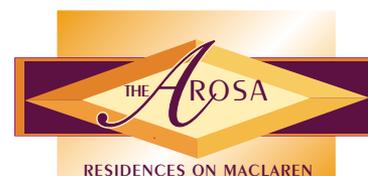


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high acetone content and the wood sealer is vinyl-based. The top coats can be either solvent- or water-based. Similarly, the composite panels of typical cabinets have formaldehyde glues bonding the wood fibers together.

Deslaurier began to offer greener alternatives about five years ago as new technologies and new water-based products appeared on the market. “We

wanted to be part of the green movement, and had been talking about automating a totally water-based finishing system,” Staples says.

After fire destroyed their Renfrew factory in January 2009, the company launched a full-scale environmental plan to develop a cabinet that is “100 per cent green” in the board and finishing materials. Cleaner air in the plant and an efficient automated process that

uses less energy and produces less waste than before are equally important for his company, Staples adds.

Waste is an obvious by-product of renovation and rather than dumping it for landfill, renovators are saving it for re-sale or recycling. Oakwood has a large warehouse stocked with salvaged doors, windows, and fine older trim and baseboards that will find new life in renovations of older Ottawa homes whose owners want to retain the look of the original interiors.

Deslaurier disposes of top quality cabinets in discontinued styles at reduced prices and ships off wood waste for recycling whenever possible. Steve Barkhouse says that his company recycles about 96 per cent of project waste, much of it re-sold or donated to Habitat for Humanity. In fact, the boom in donations in recent years prompted Habitat to open its second public Re-Store in October 2007, virtually doubling store space to just under 20,000 square feet, according to Myrna Beattie, Habitat for Humanity’s director of retail operations.

In addition to used items in good condition like wooden stair railings, lighting fixtures, sinks, toilets and doors, Habitat Re-Stores stock new end-of-line floor covering, tiles, and a variety of hardware. “Ottawa’s ‘home’ stores are very generous,” Beattie comments, probably donating some 35 per cent of Habitat’s merchandise.

And once again, small is beautiful in the eyes of the energy-wise. Conservation-minded renovators will often try to make better use of the existing space in a home rather than propose an expensive addition. “By careful planning we tend to reclaim a lot of the house that was not being used,” says Liptak.

As with all purchases, green renovation is a matter of consumers educating themselves as part of the process and then finding a like-minded renovation professional to do the job.

Denys sums it up: “Everybody is looking to do things a better way and reduce consumption.”



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