

Ready for a green makeover?



Ahead of World Environment Day on June 5, Bindu Gopal Rao talks to experts who believe that the change must begin with our homes. Let's look at how we can turn our abodes into sustainable and green habitats.

Our world is changing. Errant weather, starkly reducing natural resources, shrinking landscapes and rising threats of pollution — things are taking a turn for the worse. So, what can one do in such situations? Well, it turns out you — just another homeowner — can do a lot. All you need is a 'green' makeover for your abode and you will be doing your bit for Mother Nature.

Yes, home interiors can be made ecologically sensitive just like the exterior structure can be made environmentally friendly. Eco-friendly materials can be easily integrated as part of the design in home interiors. But one has to make a conscious effort to keep the environment in mind when doing up the home. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

The three R's

To make your home environment friendly, it is important to follow the policy of reduce, recycle and reuse. Select materials which have maximum recycled content and those that can be refurbished and reused. "Old wood can definitely be remodelled to give it a contemporary look or an antique look. One can also use flooring made of recycled material, natural local stone, wood flooring made of fast growing and renewable materials like cork, bamboo, linoleum and recycled rubber," says Dr Aditi Sah Bisht, sustainable architect, UrbanClap.com.

Materials such as paints, coatings, adhesives and sealants that have low volatile organic compounds (VOC) must be selected. "Furniture is a common culprit because it emits VOCs over time. Some of these pollutants can be toxic to people with respiratory diseases or chemical sensitivities. And since people spend a lot of time in close proximity to furniture, the long-term effects of VOCs can be significantly detrimental to one's health," says Ashwini Deodeshmukh, head — sustainability, Godrej Interio.

Initially, eco-friendly materials were typically used only for the flooring and ceilings, but now a lot of builders are using natural eco-friendly materials like stone, wood, glass, natural metals like copper and brass as wall textures as an alternative to paint and for storage as an alternative to laminates, believes Arshia Ladak, head of marketing, residential Phoenix Mills Ltd.

Materially speaking

Creating sustainable interiors is more than just using eco-friendly materials; it has a lot to do with the way we live. A good beginning is to simply inculcate the habit of saving resources and energy. Secondly, eco-friendly decor largely involves smart use of materials and products. "Alternate materials such as bamboo, sisal, cork wood and jute are being used to create a variety of products from furniture, floor coverings, table linen to lamp shades and hold-all bags. These are easy and instant ways of bringing in a green change in your home decor. You could also explore other options such as using non-toxic paints, multipurpose furniture made with recycled wood in natural stains and finishes," opines Sharika Bhan, business head — home & lifestyle, Fabindia.

From recycled metals in foundations and structures, to sustainable floorings like bamboo, LED lights, low VOC paints, to eco-friendly hardware of recycled bronze, there are options galore to go green. Likewise, today glass has become an integral part of modern-day architecture. It not only gives the designers the choice of finish and a manifestation to their design aspirations, but also a wonderful chance to participate with the outside world.

"Glass is available in a stupendous variety of styles, colours, designs and textures. Whether it is used for facades, doors and windows, or in interiors, glass is the perfect material for creating a stunning effect and stylish ambience. For confined spaces, glass is the preferred solution. It makes interiors look larger and livelier by reflecting light, illuminating surfaces, and connecting the inside to the outside," says Vikram Khanna, COO — consumer glass, Asahi India Glass Ltd.

Sustainability is all about acting now while thinking about the future. An easy way is to make use of natural plants to enhance decor as well as improve the indoor air quality. Likewise, use energy-efficient lighting with LED as these help save energy and electrical power and prevent emission of green house gases, which are harmful for health.

Another way to be energy-wise is to make use of natural lighting by creating skylights and capturing maximum north light. The market today has a plethora of options. Bioglass, a 100% recycled glass heated and compressed to create solid surfacing slabs, is a great choice for floors, walls and counter tops. Showercork, a new mosaic flooring created with 100% post- industrial recycled wine cork slices, coco tiles or coconut shell tiles finished with low VOC resin and set on backer made of sustainably harvested wood are great ways to put your green thumb to action.

"Eco-friendly interior design focuses majorly on improving indoor air quality naturally. Paint, cabinets, rugs, and upholstery all have a big impact on indoor air quality. From having a small bonsai plant to energy-saving windows, which lets sunlight inside to choosing the right products, all play a major role in improving the indoor air quality," says S Mahesh Anand, president — decorative business, Nippon Paint (India) Pvt Ltd.

New life to the old

In keeping with the concept of sustainable design, 2016 is the year in which your living room becomes more natural and less 'plastic'. It's all about live edges, raw and organic forms, be it natural wood, wicker, sea grass, jute etc.

"Vintage as a decor trend is in like never before, along with recycled, shabby and distressed wood in furniture and accessories. It's time to check out those flea markets, ancestral homes and even the Internet to salvage old pieces. Mixing vintage styles with your modern pieces can create a wonderfully eclectic room and sometimes, just a coat of paint can change the entire look of a piece," says Preeta Dutta, owner, Mirador.

Rattan or wicker is making a comeback as a material for the home, both indoor and outdoor. Designers are now looking at how to work this eco-friendly yet versatile material into more modern designs and eclectic designs. Anagha Dandekar, founder, Hardware Renaissance explains, "One of the biggest trends is buying local. Products that are crafted in sustainable ways, closer to the point of use, make a lot of sense. Far less energy is used in transportation and packaging, and it supports the domestic economy as well."

Namita Agarwal, head, interior design, Mebelkart.com agrees, "3D-wall panels made from crushed sugarcane fibres are trending since they are not very expensive, look beautiful, are eco-friendly, can be painted in any colour and provide possibility of a variety of texture."

There has been a marked increase in the use of recycled corrugated cardboard as an eco-friendly raw material and Bandana Jain, founder and director, Sylvn Studio, states that designers are now beginning to appreciate its incredible strength and versatility. Burlap, bamboo and industrial scrap, among others, are also being seriously considered as good options.

As you can see, making the green choice is not that difficult — it's all about investing in something sustainable and eco-friendly for your lovely abode.