



Green, cool and eco-friendly

The majority of people spend most of the time indoors. By going green and sustainable in your interior design, you can create a healthy living space that looks and feels good.
By Donna White.

Can you remember the 70's BBC sitcom, 'The Good Life'? This long-running series contrasted, to comic effect, one couple's attempt to live self-sufficiently with the materialistic lifestyle of their neighbours. The couple were seen as 'alternative'.

However, that was then. Sustainability is now the 'new normal'. It is part and parcel of what it means to design and live responsibly and well. Being 'Green' is cool and eco-friendly.

Being Green does not mean sacrificing luxury. They can co-exist. My definition of luxury isn't having a lot of things - it is valuing quality over quantity. The quality I am talking about is organic, renewable, recyclable and healthy. This is a timeless way to decorate our interiors.

I believe the key to sustainable living is reducing consumption. We think about how we use energy and water, but it's not simply a case of reducing this consumption. In our interiors it is about assessing what we already own.

When you undergo a home renovation, you don't have to start from scratch to make a huge difference to your interior space. Before you rush out and buy anything new, consider using what you already have.

When I visit a new client, I always ask if I can look at what they have in storage or hidden away in cupboards. A fresh eye, and an open mind to what you already own, not only saves money (husbands love this approach), but also supports the new 'normal', which is sustainability.

When I take a client brief, I establish what furniture and accessories the homeowner wishes to retain, discard, reupholster, repaint, or replace. Small signs of wear and tear add character to vintage pieces. So long as the inner frame is in good condition. A contemporary fabric can give tired upholstery a new lease of life. An old desk or table can take on a new dimension if spray-painted in a bright modern colour.

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Sustainability not only means buying less, but it also means buying better things – as the saying goes, 'you buy cheap, you buy twice'. If you need to replace, or purchase a new piece of furniture, I believe, and have always believed, that quality is important.

A well-designed and well-made piece of furniture has the potential to last a lifetime, if not several lifetimes, provided it is well looked after. In fact, good quality furniture made from good quality materials has the potential to improve with age and use. It will acquire character, value and patina over time.

When a piece of furniture can be passed down through generations it removes the need for raw materials to take its

place, as well as manufacturing and disposal. Today's purchases become tomorrow's antiques. Buying things that don't have to be replaced is one of the greenest game plans you can have.

Many people are attracted to second-hand or vintage furniture, not simply because it is often cheaper than new, but because of its quality. Furniture that has stood the test of time is generally robustly made.

Whether it is an antique in the auction room, or a chair missing a leg in the skip on the street, second-hand furniture comes at every price point and every level of desirability. Whatever the source or price tag, 'pre-owned' pieces are greener than new.

Green interior design focuses not only on reducing the impact that furniture purchases have on the environment, but also on using products or practices that have little, or no harmful effect on our health.

Findings from NZ Survey Data confirms that the indoor home environment is where New Zealanders spend most of their time (72-73%). Since so much of our time is spent indoors, it is crucial that close attention is paid to the products we bring into our homes.

In the present economic climate and with every day bringing new evidence of the harm our dependency on fossil fuels has done and is doing to the planet, sustainable living looks less and less eccentric and more like common sense. ■