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Sustainable Design

By JANE AMMESON

In the months ahead, as winter browns transform to budding greens, the color also takes on new meaning in home décor trends.

"The green movement has changed the way manufacturers approach design," says Katherine Flaherty. "Consumers can now indulge their green side while still being design forward." Flaherty, who is Vice President of Kitchen, Bath and Building Products at the Merchandise Mart (MMPI), enumerates the many luxury brands that are embracing strict sustainable design. She includes Farrow & Ball's low VOC paint and wall covering collection, and Kohler Store's Archer toilet—the company's first one-piece, single-flush, gravity, high-efficiency toilet.

Locally, Valucine Chicago helped pioneered the green initiative by researching innovative technologies that allow for low environmental impact production of its cabinetry.

Many businesses now hold a commitment to sustainability and good environmental practices, including Remains Lighting.

"Remains uses wind power for current energy needs," says Flaherty. "They offer client incentives for reused packing materials, and buy 100% post-consumer recycled material for all new packing."

Beyond going green, Flaherty says she's noticed a lot of sleek, contemporary kitchen cabinetry products from several Chicago brands such as Ernestomeda Chicago which recently unveiled the Carré display by Marc Sadler.

"This state of the art kitchen combines a wide variety of color and material options," says Flaherty. "A distinctive feature of Carré is the handle, transformed into an elegant groove in the door which can be created in no less than 230,000 shapes, sizes and colors. Constructed with high-gloss lacquered finishes in red, white and black, the cabinets have a sleek minimalist look to them."

Another Chicago company, Studio Snaidero, offers their Orange line with wall units in different widths and heights that are designed to exploit space. "Glass used for the Orange kitchen doors and worktops produce aesthetic appeal with 3D-depth, which also enhances the lightness and transparency of the doors," says Flaherty. "The glass blends with the eco-friendly nature of the Orange kitchen project. Glass is non-toxic, recyclable and inert: it does not contaminate the environment."

Porcelanosa recently unveiled its Woodtec tiles made from ceramic that look like real wood. "The look and feel of the tile is so real in comparison to natural wood, without all of the maintenance," says Flaherty.

"Ahalya Stone introduced a line of green products called ECOverings. This new line of surfacing products are naturally occurring, recycled and manufactured with concern for the conservation of natural resources. Available in two materials, BioLuminum, made from reclaimed airplane aluminum, and BioGlass, created from recycled glass bottles, will give any project a unique result. Indah, which means beautiful in Bahasa Indonesian, is a collection of intricate, hand-carved wood tiles expertly crafted from sustainably harvested plantation teak from Ann Sacks."

Julia Chappell of MMPI's Design Center sees vintage wine—a paint color by Benjamin Moore—as being the spring season's big color.

"But neutrals are always fashionable," she says noting that honeysuckle and pale color creams are in. "Wallpaper is back including textured paper. The papers available are amazing—like hand painted wallpaper. For furniture, we see clean lines. And there are wonderful, wonderful accents such as tiebacks for curtains."

Grey is the new black says Flaherty. "I've been seeing a lot of grey and white in kitchens and bathrooms lately," she says, noting the colors aren't as dramatic as black and white. "Grey and white is a soft, elegant palette that will work in any space, no matter what the style of the home is. Ann Sacks recently launched a new line with Michael S. Smith called Cosmati. It's an exclusive hand-crafted stone mosaic program designed by one of the industry's most respected talents, which comes in some beautiful grey and white shades. The collection offers a breathtaking range of designs that draw inspiration from various elements of Greek, Moroccan and Parisian antiquities."

John H. Brennen III, MMPI's Executive Vice President, adds that they now have a million square feet of residential design open to the public. "Our DreamHome—which opens this April—starts the education process," he says. "And we offer a free one-hour consultation. People can just walk in or make an appointment. We have no barriers here so if people want to come in and browse, they can do that."

"After the consultation, consumers can retain the consultant if they want," he says. "But there's no obligation. There are seven entrances to this building and people can come and go as they like."

The Mart also contains the 100,000-square-foot .LuxeHome, including 30 home building and renovation boutiques.

"Your kitchen and bath should reflect your personal style and needs," says Flaherty. "You don't have to go overboard and design your space with the latest trends in mind. Pick a trend and customize it to fit your lifestyle. Trends may come and go, but some colors and styles will remain timeless—like a grey and white color scheme."

Chappell agrees. "We had designer Alexa Hampton—her father is designer Mark Hampton—here, and she said she doesn't believe in trends," she says. "She said you like what you like. If you look in your closet and all your clothes are black and white, why would you want pale yellow walls? It's about what you like."

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