

GREEN

BUILDING PRODUCTS

Minimize or eliminate negative environmental or health impacts

By Deborah R. Huso

Green building isn't just a fringe idea anymore. In fact, making use of green building products—materials that minimize or eliminate negative environmental or health impacts—is not only hitting the mainstream, it's also becoming more cost competitive.

Skip the hype, and take a look at some green building products that really work and won't pinch the pocketbook either:

Quiet, healthy floors with wool

If you're thinking about putting down new floors, you might want to consider what goes under them. Many manufacturers now offer natural wool underlayments for hardwood, engineered and laminate floors. The floors not only insulate to prevent the transmission of sound between floors, but the wool actually absorbs VOCs (volatile organic compounds like formaldehyde), thus helping to clear indoor air. Plus, wool is a renewable resource, as sheep are shorn annually.

Green floors

You can enjoy the beautiful look of hardwood floors without cutting down the rainforest. Bamboo flooring is becoming increasingly popular. It looks like hardwood, but it's actually made from a quickly renewing grass that's tougher than many standard hardwoods, such as maple. Be sure to do your homework on manufacturers, however, and find one that uses water-based, solvent-free adhesives and finishes that won't give off toxic fumes. The best part is that bamboo flooring is generally cheaper than hardwood, too. Another option that's especially good for kitchens and other high-traffic areas is cork flooring. Made from the bark of the cork oak tree, it can be harvested without cutting down the tree, and has a unique soft feel to the feet and will withstand a glass being dropped on it without damage to the glass or the floor because of its resiliency. It costs about the same as hardwood floors but requires less maintenance and is less susceptible to damage from spills and wear.

Quickly renewing kitchens

Floors aren't the only place where you can install quickly renewing wood products these days. Cabinetmakers are also offering kitchens made from sustainably harvested cherry, as well as bamboo. You can even get countertops made from jarrah (a eucalyptus hardwood), recycled glass and granite.



Wood Flooring International



Bamkeley Mills

Bamboo flooring looks like hardwood, but it's actually made from a quickly renewing grass that's tougher than many standard hardwoods, such as maple. Cabinetmakers are also offering kitchens made from bamboo (shown) as well as sustainably harvested cherry.

Paint cleaner and greener

If you're getting ready to change the look of a room with a fresh coat of paint, consider using low- or no-VOC paints. Many paints today contain VOCs that help them dry faster, but the trade-off is the release of chemicals that create pollution of ground-level ozone and irritation to homeowners with respiratory problems or allergies. Generally, low- or no-VOC paints cost the same, and sometimes less, than regular paints. Most major paint manufacturers sell them, so be sure to ask when you're in the paint store or read the can label to see the level of VOCs the paint contains. 