

BRINGING HOME THE GREEN

A ROOM-BY-ROOM GUIDE TO MAKING
YOUR HOME MORE ECO-FRIENDLY

by Kathy Kidwell



THIS 2,650-SQUARE-FOOT GREEN HOME was built by DiGiacomo Homes & Renovation Inc. on a tear-down lot in Golden Valley. The home is being considered for silver-level certification by Minnesota GreenStar. "We learned that building green is less costly, less difficult and added more value than we had all jointly anticipated," says Rocky DiGiacomo, president of the Minnetonka-based DiGiacomo Homes & Renovation Inc. "It was an education."

Photography by Paul Markert, courtesy of DiGiacomo Homes & Renovation Inc.

You see it on TV, in magazines and newspapers, online, in fashion, on billboards, in stores ... the green movement is everywhere. Celebrities are endorsing it, your friends are into it—you're into it, too, but what exactly can you do to be more eco-friendly in and around your home?

"Going green can be as simple as turning off the lights in empty rooms or as elaborate as building a new home that is green from the foundation all the way to the solar panels on the roof," says Rachel Maloney, owner of Natural Built Home in Minneapolis. "It is important to remember that every small step helps. Regardless of the size of your green budget, there is a long list of things you can do to live a more sustainable lifestyle."

To give you ideas for decreasing your home's environmental impact, the following checklists provide a room-by-room outline, with some expert tips to offer guidance along the way.

LIVING AREAS

Photo courtesy of Mike Otto Construction Inc.

- ❑ Use low- or no-VOC paints and stains.
- ❑ Use compact fluorescent (CFL) or LED light bulbs and install dimmers.
- ❑ Turn off power strips or unplug electronics when not in use.
- ❑ Install Energy Star-qualified ceiling fans.
- ❑ Keep and care for indoor houseplants to increase air quality.
- ❑ With the help of window treatments, utilize the heat of sunlight when needed, or block it out to keep your home cooler.
- ❑ Consider replacing wall-to-wall carpeting with sustainable materials such as cork or reclaimed hardwood. Most carpets off-gas toxins and all collect dust, pollutants and allergens.
- ❑ If you choose to install carpeting or rugs, purchase those that have the Carpet and Rug Industry's (CRI) Green Label or Green Label Plus. These carpets emit low or no VOCs.
- ❑ Whenever possible, repurpose furniture and decor instead of buying new. When purchasing furniture and decor, choose items made locally or second-hand items at antique stores or flea markets.
- ❑ If you have older windows, upgrading to double-pane, low-E glazing will give you the most bang for your buck in energy savings and comfort.
- ❑ Install clear, solar heat-control window film on windows.

KITCHEN AND LAUNDRY ROOM

- ❑ Wait to run your dishwasher, washer and dryer until you have full loads.
- ❑ Wash clothes in cold water.
- ❑ Buy food in bulk to cut down on packaging waste.
- ❑ Set up a readily accessible recycling and composting center.
- ❑ Donate or recycle old appliances and install Energy Star-qualified appliances.
- ❑ Clean refrigerator coils and reseal the refrigerator, if needed.
- ❑ Use eco-friendly, non-toxic cleaners.
- ❑ When it's time to remodel, install cabinets certified by the Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturer's Association (KCMA) Environmental Stewardship Program (ESP), countertops made of recycled and/or local materials and linoleum or flooring made from sustainable or reclaimed materials.
- ❑ Use eco-friendly dinnerware (made of recycled glass, bamboo, etc.). When disposable dinnerware is necessary, use biodegradable and compostable plates, bowls and cups.
- ❑ Use a microwave or pressure cooker whenever possible. When a stove is necessary, a convection oven is the best choice to maximize efficiency. ▶



Photography by Troy Thies, courtesy of Showcase Renovation

SAGE ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

"Cast iron is the most energy-efficient and healthy material for pots and pans. When it comes to dishware, look for environmentally friendly ceramics and bowls, as well as cutting boards and utensils

made from bamboo."

—Jill Fehrenbacher, editor-in-chief of *Inhabitat.com*

BATHROOMS

- ❑ Install low-flow showerheads, faucet aerators and high-efficiency, water-saving toilets (look for the WaterSense label on new toilet purchases).
- ❑ Immediately repair all leaky faucets and toilets.
- ❑ Check your local codes to see if you can install a greywater system. These systems collect water from bathroom sinks, tubs and showers to supply water to flush the toilet.
- ❑ Place a brick in the toilet tank to reduce the amount of water needed to fill and flush the unit. It will still work effectively.
- ❑ Install a timer switch on your bathroom exhaust fan.
- ❑ Consider installing a heat-recovery system on the drainpipe of your shower to preheat the incoming cold water.
- ❑ Use eco-friendly, non-toxic cleaners and biodegradable soaps.
- ❑ Purchase and use organic cotton towels and organic toilet paper.
- ❑ Install tubular skylights to let in daylight and minimize use of electricity.
- ❑ When it's time to remodel, install cabinets certified by the Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturer's Association (KCMA) Environmental Stewardship Program (ESP), countertops made of recycled and/or local materials and linoleum or flooring made from sustainable or reclaimed materials.

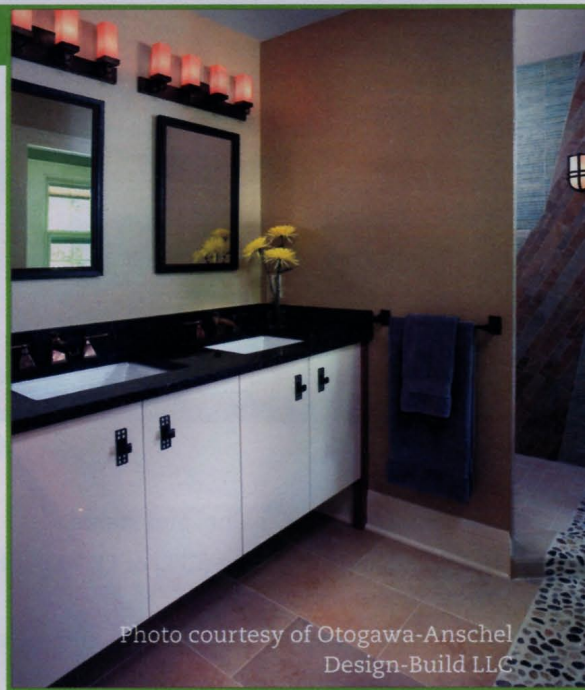


Photo courtesy of Otogawa-Anschel Design-Build LLC

BASEMENT, ATTIC AND UTILITY ROOM

- ❑ To determine areas of your home that leak energy, have an energy audit performed by a certified Home Energy Rating Specialist (HERS) rater.
- ❑ Insulate and seal your basement, attic, crawlspace and any areas of your home that can be considered "unconditioned" or unfinished.
- ❑ Consider installing a whole-house/attic exhaust fan to reduce your HVAC use.
- ❑ Make sure all bathroom, kitchen and laundry room vents lead outside the home, not into the attic, to avoid mold.
- ❑ Lower the thermostat on your water heater. A setting of 120 degrees provides comfortable hot water for most uses.
- ❑ Inspect, clean or change air filters monthly in your central air conditioner, furnace and/or heat pump.
- ❑ When a new furnace is needed, purchase an Energy Star-qualified furnace or heat pump.
- ❑ When a new water heater is needed, consider a tankless, on-demand or solar water heater.
- ❑ Install a programmable thermostat. Program it to decrease heating or air conditioning use when you're away from home or asleep.
- ❑ Check with your local utility company and see if you can purchase renewable energy.
- ❑ Purchase a whole-house power meter to keep track of your energy usage.
- ❑ Seal the forced-air ductwork that you can.



SAGE ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS



"Custom fit your heating and cooling system to your home. Sizing and proper installation practices can dramatically improve how well your equipment delivers comfort and savings. Expect to pay a little more for a good contractor who follows these practices."

—Lani Macrae, Energy Star communications manager for the U.S. Department of Energy



GREEN OUTDOOR LIVING

Photo courtesy of the
Western Red Cedar Lumber Association

'environmental footprint' than other non-wood building materials. Western red cedar comes from independently certified, sustainably managed forests."

—Paul Mackie, Western Red Cedar Lumber Association

DID YOU KNOW?

According to Michael Rogers, senior vice president of GreenHomes America, most homes have a deficiency in insulation, air-sealing, HVAC equipment, lighting efficiency and windows. Modest investments in improvements can save 30-40 percent off energy bills, and energy improvements done correctly increase comfort, improve indoor air quality and lead to a more durable, sustainable home.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST MYTH ABOUT GREEN LIVING?

We polled dozens of experts from all areas of green home improvement to find out. Here's what they said: **It costs more.** "In truth, some aspects of being 'green' can cost more than some people would like to pay," say the experts at Orfield Design & Construction Inc. (www.orfelddesign.com) in St. Louis Park. "But everyone can do little things that add up and will save you money in the long run on energy and water bills, which have been increasing dramatically in recent years. Essentially, you pay more now to save much more later, and you do the world a favor in the process." 🏠

Editorial Resources begin on page 21.



THE TEAM at Orfield Design & Construction Inc.

RESOURCES

Cabinet Expressions

674 W. 92nd St.
Bloomington, MN 55420
(952) 345-6647
www.cabinetexpressions.net
See our ad on page 21

The Color Center/Carpet One

701 Highway 7
Excelsior, MN 55331
(952) 474-5605
www.colorcenterexcelsior.com
See our ad on page 19

Granite Transformations

575 Shoreview Park Road
Shoreview, MN 55126
(651) 777-7600
www.granitetransformations.com
See our ad on page 7

Innovative Surfaces

515 Spiral Blvd.
Hastings, MN 55033
(651) 437-1004
www.innovativesurfaces.com
See our ad on page 24

Kate-Lo Tile & Stone

171 Cheshire Lane, Suite 100
Plymouth, MN 55441
(763) 450-3636
www.katelotile.com
See our ad on page 23

Minnesota Standard Showplace

6363 Highway 7
St. Louis Park, MN 55416
(952) 920-1460
www.minnesotastandardshowplace.com
See our ad on page 8

Select Surfaces

1718A Lexington Ave. N.
Roseville, MN 55113
(651) 483-1576
www.selectsurfaces.com
See our ad on page 4

Sherwin-Williams

(800) 4-Sherwin
www.sherwin-williams.com
See our ad on page 3

Stone Systems-SileStone

8665 Hudson Blvd., Suite 100A
Lake Elmo, MN 55042
(651) 714-1572
www.amccountertops.com
See our ad on page 10, 11

SAGE ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS



"Going green has a ton of different meanings. These simple tips are just that: Tips. You can choose to do all of them, but at least try one of them. I promise your wallet and your planet will thank you."

—Brice Cooper, owner of Brain Child Designs, designer in HGTV's *Design on a Dime* and Fox daytime's *Design Invasion*



"'Going green' is a lot like weight loss. Usually, the extreme attempts fail. But when we make realistic changes over time ... we can achieve our ideal, healthy weights. The same is true with greening our home."

—Helen Coronato, educator, speaker and author of *Eco-Friendly Families*