

# Green *on the* Inside

*Better living through green remodeling  
and healthy interiors*

BY JOHN IMES

Are you looking to create a healthier, more comfortable home while saving money and enhancing the environment? Then you might want to think “green remodeling” for your next home improvement project.

Green remodeling is an approach that incorporates environmentally sensitive practices throughout the home improvement process. It means thinking about how we use design, technology and materials to achieve economic, environmental and quality of life benefits.

By way of a little research and careful planning, green remodeling can help ensure that your home will have reduced energy and maintenance costs, better indoor air quality, improved health, safety and comfort, reduced environmental impact and market distinction for future resale. Your home will look great, work better and have a reduced impact on the environment. And with Americans spending over \$175 billion on remodeling projects each year, it makes “green” sense to do it right!

## Green remodeling tips

**Save money and more:** According to the Rocky Mountain Institute, a typical single-family home’s electric bill is \$1,400 per year and results in the emission of over 26,000 pounds of carbon dioxide and other pollutants. By integrating efficient design with high levels of insulation, high-performance windows, air tightness, and energy-efficient mechanical equipment, lighting and appliances, you can save a lot on utility bills while reducing the environmental impacts of energy production.

**Provide a safe and healthy home:** The average American spends more than 90 percent of their time indoors and the United States EPA estimates that the level of indoor air pollution can be two to 5 times greater than outdoors. By using building materials that are



non-toxic and formaldehyde-free, plus proper ventilation, sealed combustion equipment and efficient air cleaners, you can prevent mold, mildew, allergens and other indoor air quality problems. Finding environmentally friendly paints, coatings and adhesives is also getting easier.

**Be water wise:** According to the American Water Works Association, if all U.S. households installed water saving features, water use would decrease by 30 percent, resulting in a savings of over \$4 billion per year. Make sure your remodeling project includes low-flow faucets and showerheads, not to mention a highly efficient clothes washer and dishwasher.

**Waste not, want not:** Wisconsin generates approximately 1.0 million tons of construction and demolition

debris each year. While a sizeable portion of this debris such as cardboard, lumber and drywall could be recycled, much of it is sent directly to a landfill. Ask your contractor to post a job site recycling plan and make sure it’s followed. Use recycled or salvaged building materials. Recycling reduces the need for new raw materials and the environmental impacts of extracting resources, manufacturing and shipping.

**A good green product is (not) hard to find:** Most green building materials are neither difficult to find nor more expensive than conventional ones. In many cases, these materials are available at your local hardware store, lumberyard or large home center.

Wherever possible, make sure your remodeling project includes the following categories of green building materials:

- **Recycled-content** — All or a portion of the product is made with materials that might otherwise be bound for a landfill (i.e. carpet made from recycled milk jugs and soda bottles.)
- **Durable** — The product will last longer, require less maintenance, and save you money.

- **Made with renewable resources** — The resource from which the material is made can be readily replenished (i.e. bamboo for flooring, which can be harvested every three to 6 years.)
- **Resource efficient** — The product was designed to use fewer materials more efficiently, yet perform as well or better than standard products (i.e. engineered lumber made from small-diameter lumber resulting in a product stronger than standard wood.)
- **Healthier** — The products are non-toxic or have reduced chemical content compared to other products (i.e. formaldehyde-free insulation, low VOC paints and finishes.)
- **Locally-produced materials** — Long-distance transport of building materials can be very energy intensive.

### Does green remodeling look any different than typical projects?

Not at all. In the historic Madison landmark, the Arbor House (see previous page), a remodeled bathroom incorporates beauty, comfort and a variety of green features, including:

- Forest Stewardship Certified (FSC) plywood sheathing
- Formaldehyde-free insulation
- Quiet, energy-efficient ventilation
- Tile made from recycled glass
- Salvaged stain-glass windows
- Water efficient faucet and toilet
- 95 percent efficient hot water and radiant in-floor heating
- Low toxic caulk, finishes and healthy Safe Coat paints

### Green-it-yourself resources:

Research, plan and then ask your contractor about ways to “green” your next home improvement project. If homeowners request “green” building and remodeling, contractors will respond and retailers will make green building products more available.

Use the Green Built Home™ program and online resources. The Green Built Home Checklist has over 220 ideas to save money, protect our natural resources and improve your family’s health, safety and comfort. To learn more about Green Built Home, visit [www.greenbuilthome.org](http://www.greenbuilthome.org) You’ll find the Green Built Home Buyers Guide, Product Directory, Waterfront Property Checklist, list of participating builders and more...

- *The New Natural House Book* by David Pearson (1998)
- The Seattle Sustainable Building Program has excellent green home remodeling resources available at [www.seattle.gov/sustainablebuilding/greenhome.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/sustainablebuilding/greenhome.htm)
- The Habitat ReStore, Dane County’s used and surplus building materials center, 208 Cottage Grove Rd. 608-661-2813, [www.restoredane.org](http://www.restoredane.org)
- Safe Building Solutions [www.safebuildingsolutions.com](http://www.safebuildingsolutions.com). If you’re in the Milwaukee area, visit their showroom at W29 S4498 Hillside Rd. in Waukesha.
- Home Environment [www.home-environment.com](http://www.home-environment.com) Offers earth-friendly products, including safer paints, stains, cleaning products and more. 216 N. Henry St. 608-251-4905

# SOMETHING MISSING

*Make your new home a Green Built Home*



**Build a better house, build a better world.**

#### Benefits for homeowners

- Reduced energy and maintenance costs
- Better indoor air quality
- Improved health, safety, comfort and durability
- Knowledge that homes have less environmental impact
- Market distinction for resale

#### Ask your builder

#### Benefits for the environment

- Conserves water, energy and other resources
- Energy efficient
- Renewable/recycled materials
- Less waste/long life cycle
- Environmentally minded products, materials and design practices

Information and resources:

**[www.greenbuilthome.org](http://www.greenbuilthome.org)**



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