

# A STUDY IN COLOR

From color options to a frame of mind, “green” is ruling the worlds of architecture and design. *By Michael Ventre*



A green patio by interior designer Lori Dennis

When it comes to green, the environment has surpassed money and envy—and, for that matter, envy over money—as the preeminent representation of that color in modern society. Kermit the Frog, the Boston Celtics and guacamole are mere afterthoughts in the discussion.

One reason green is picking up steam in this regard is because it is rapidly encompassing the areas of building, architecture and interior design. Much like the grass and leaves that remind us of continuous growth and change, the structures we live in are being rethought in an effort to make them more compatible with the planet they sit on.

As another Earth Day dawns—the annual observation, dedication and celebration of all things green around the globe—architects, builders and interior designers who specialize in environmentally conscious work are immersing themselves in the never-ending wave of new advances and cutting-edge techniques in their fields.

“One of the most notable differences in recent years involves the money side of green,” says Barbara Bestor. She began Bestor Architecture in 1995 and built her first house out of locally milled timber in 1998. Among her recent credits are Pitfire Artisan Pizza in Culver City, an adaptive reuse of an old building that

also involved creating new menus and packaging with recycled materials; and a luxury retreat for a private client in Santa Barbara that is solar-powered, with radiant heat and self-insulating concrete walls. “Almost everything these days is a combination of economic and altruistic,” she says.

In the area of materials, the green-minded architect, builder and interior designer are discovering more and more options. One specific change is energy-efficient LED lighting. “It’s coming down radically in price and increasing the

amount of light it produces,” says Bestor, adding that local building codes are making the installation of LED lighting more common.

Steve Glenn, who owns Santa Monica-based LivingHomes, develops modern, sustainably designed prefabricated homes. He agrees many of the most significant developments in his business involve costs being reduced. “A lot more companies

are introducing sustainable home products, and the pricing is coming down,” says Glenn. “Also, big manufacturers are getting into it. You have places like The Home Depot selling a full range of sustainable materials. The company made a decision to carry those products—that ramps up production and brings the cost down.”

Innovation is taking place among green thinkers in many areas. Steven Ehrlich

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— Barbara Bestor, Architect



Inside a prefabricated house by LivingHomes



A prefabricated LivingHomes house in Santa Monica

of Ehrlich Architects—headquartered in Culver City—sees current trends expanding even further. “In the future I think we’ll see glass that produces electricity,” he says. “We’ll also see greater embracing of operable sunshade devices on the exteriors of buildings.”

As for eco-centric interior designers, they’re no longer curiosities in their field. Their options have expanded—almost enough to match their imaginations.

Alison Shoemaker, who started Los Angeles-based Alison Designs in 2003 after years of working for other designers, specializes in a “green and gorgeous” look. “I think the biggest thing is that beige is out,” says Shoemaker. “The green movement used to be so beige and granola-looking. A lot of that had to do with how they had to recycle things then. Everything just came out looking the same—beige, beige, beige.”

“There’s finally been a lot of movement in color. You go into [organic] furniture stores and upholstery places, and you’ll find great colors in fabrics,” she says. “A lot of paint

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—Steven Ehrlich, Architect

companies, too, have gone mainstream with a ‘green’ palette. You can get just about any color now in green paint.”

LA-based interior designer Lori Dennis is another who is glad the creative shackles have been taken off in terms of available products, and she is now free to go green with abandon. “Maybe 10 years ago you couldn’t find a luxury, high-end product,” says Dennis. “We were limited to bamboo fabric, bamboo flooring, plywood made with recycled-content wood—things that were so unattractive you couldn’t sell them to a high-end client. Now you can go into the Pacific Design Center and find high-end French-looking woven patterns or Spanish things you wouldn’t think would be green. They’re found in almost every showroom.”

After a structure has been conceived, that’s where specialists including Andrea Robinson come in. She is the founder and director of ARC Sustainability in Los Angeles. Basically, she comes in and “greens” a residence or business, advising clients on the choice of building materials, energy systems, water-saving mechanisms and more. One of the major factors she focuses on is helping to change the behavior of her clients in order to save energy and be more eco-efficient. “I just finished a solar project for a residence,” she says. “It was ridiculous how much energy [the client] was using. He would leave his screen door open while the air conditioner was on to let his pet in and out, so we designed a special pet door. Little, silly things like that make a huge impact.” **LAC**