

Green Ideas for Kitchen Remodeling

BY BRUCE WENTWORTH

Knowing which sustainable, eco-friendly products to use when remodeling a kitchen can be intimidating for homeowners. Is the material really “green,” or is it just marketed as such? Will the product hold up to daily use in my kitchen? Am I paying more for a green product? So when homeowners ask how to incorporate green products in their kitchen remodeling, we try to keep it simple and practical.

As the green building industry matures, it will become easier to make these decisions. Many building industry experts predict that in a decade we will no longer call it “green building” because using sustainable, eco-friendly products will be the norm. It will just be the way we build. Until then, here are a few basic tips on cost-effective green products we at Wentworth Inc. have used in kitchen remodeling projects.

Kitchen Cabinets

Cabinets faced with a wood veneer from plantation-grown trees is one way to minimize the environmental impact of your kitchen remodeling. For a recent kitchen remodel, we specified cabinets with bamboo veneer – a quick growing, abundant grass material (www.corsicabinetry.com) and (www.plybo.com). Thin layers of veneer, whether wood or grass, stretch the usefulness of the product.

Another plantation-grown wood to consider is Lyptus, which is the trade name for a hybrid of a Eucalyptus tree grown on plantations in Brazil. Lyptus most resembles maple in appearance and can be treated with a multitude of different finishes. Lyptus trees are harvested every 15 years and are an alternative to precious oak, cherry, mahogany and other trees. The use of veneers has been around for centuries and is a proven way to fabricate beautiful cabinetry.

Countertop

Recycled paper products are now fabricated as countertop material. Yes, paper. We recently specified a product called “PaperStone” (www.paperstoneproducts.com), which looks great and functions as though a honed granite. The PaperStone company website reports it is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. PaperStone has two versions of the product: one using 50 percent post-consumer waste recycled paper that comes in five colors, and another using 100 percent post-consumer waste paper in seven colors. Their recycled paper is mixed with a petroleum-free phenolic resin (from cashew nutshell liquid) to manufacture the product in sheets. Large sheet sizes (60-inches-by-144-inches) minimize the need for joints in your counter top, and the

product ranges in thickness from three-fourths of an inch to 1 ¼ inch. Time will reveal how well the product performs in a kitchen environment.

Backsplash

Recycled glass is a terrific way to get an attractive, cost-effective, guilt-free backsplash. For a home in Northwest Washington we specified a glass tile made by a company called Sandhill (www.sandhillind.com). The company was awarded a grant from the Alaska Science & Technology Foundation to develop innovative glass-fusing technology that utilizes 100 percent recycled glass normally destined for landfills. Their glass tile fabrication uses half the energy it takes to produce ceramic tile and a quarter of the energy it takes to produce cast-glass tile. Their glass tiles come in a range of sizes, with 36 colors, in a gloss or matte finish. For our client’s kitchen backsplash, we utilized a three color mix, in a 2-inch-by-2-inch tile, set in a diagonal pattern.

Another, more upscale, glass tile company we have utilized is Oceanside Glass Tile (www.glasstile.com). Their website claims to use up to 86 percent recycled glass in their products, and their product line is extensive. A glass tile backsplash offers a lot of visual impact for the cost, and with a professional installation, it is beautiful.



ABOVE: Remodeled kitchen with glass tile kitchen backsplash. ABOVE RIGHT: Kitchen backsplash with recycled mosaic glass tile. RIGHT: Town-home kitchen with a glass tile backsplash and bamboo plank flooring.

Flooring

Bamboo flooring is an increasingly popular way to have wood floors without cutting down trees. We recently used a product called Preserve Bamboo (www.ToMkt.com) which is available in a variety of pre-finished stains as a tongue and groove boarding. The company’s marketing material says the renewable resource, called Mao Zhu (Hairy) bamboo, is harvested every five years. Beautiful and durable, we have on occasion had reports of surface scratches.

Appliances

Appliances are an expensive part of kitchen remodeling, and the long term effect of their energy efficiency has a financial and environmental



impact. To learn more about purchasing an energy efficient dishwasher and refrigerator, visit www.energystar.gov. Cooking appliances – such as ranges, cook tops and microwaves – are not classified by Energy Star because individual homeowner's cooking styles vary too much to rank.

Dishwasher

An Energy Star qualified dishwasher uses at least 41 percent less energy than the federal minimum standard for energy consumption and significantly less water than other dishwasher models. The Energy Star website reports that if your dishwasher was made before 1994, switching to an Energy Star qualified dishwasher can save you more than \$30 a year in utility costs. Bosch, GE, Kitchen Aid and LG manufacture qualifying dishwashers.

Refrigerator

An Energy Star qualified refrigerator uses 20 percent less energy than most models. Many include automatic ice-makers and thru-the-door ice dispensers as well as top, bottom and side-by-side freezers. An Energy Star qualified refrigerator uses 40 percent less energy than a conventional model sold in 2001. Viking, GE, Amana and Sub-zero are a few examples. A visit to www.energystar.gov will help you make practical choices with your appliances.

If each American homeowner makes practical, eco-friendly choices in the products selected to remodel their kitchen, it will go a long way toward making our world a healthier place. Let's remodel.

Bruce Wentworth, AIA, is president of Wentworth Inc., a residential remodeling company that provides architecture, interiors and construction. www.wentworthstudio.com Call 240-395-0705. ★



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