



IN THE PRESS



Falmouth residents lead the Cape in every recorded aspect of green living. Laela Sayigh and Alessandro Bocconcelli of Woods Hole, with Carol, 11 and Luisa, 8, use solar power, buy other non-fossil-fuel-generated energy and drive a hybrid car.
Cape Cod Times/Ron Schloerb

'Green' becomes red-hot

By **KATHI SCRIZZI DRISCOLL**
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Green was once just a color.

Of broccoli. Of preppy pants. Of Kermit the frog.

Now it's a call to arms.

With Al Gore's Oscar-winning "An Inconvenient Truth" as a wake-up call to the masses, the idea of green living and green building has taken off in the past couple of years, inspiring books, TV shows and hundreds of products. Environmentally friendly changes have come about in everything from exterior siding to countertops, fireplace logs to cutting boards, towels to toothbrushes.

Buying "green"

- The idea of "green products" has reached into every room of the house. Some recent choices:
- Pine Mountain fire logs that burn up to 80 percent cleaner than wood and are made from fully renewable resources — recycled sawdust and vegetable wax. Duraflame has bio-wax fire logs and firestarters, too.
- California Closets' first green product last fall was a recycled wood fiber particleboard that has no urea formaldehyde added during the manufacturing process.
- Preserve Recycline toothbrush and razor handles are made from 100 percent recyclable plastics (including Stonyfield Farm yogurt cups) and can be recycled themselves.
- All-natural household cleaners by Gaiam include washable microfiber cloths, floor cleaner without petrochemicals and 100 percent biodegradable garbage bags.
- Clorox just introduced Green Works, a line of natural cleaning products "made from plant-based ingredients."
- Woven wooden blinds from Budget Blinds are made from bamboo, grass and reeds. Other products contain composite wood and other mostly recycled materials.
- Colanders, cutting boards and food storage containers are made by Preserve Kitchen from 100 percent recyclable materials.
- California-based Urban Woods makes tables, dressers and headboards from wood salvaged from demolition projects.
- Kitchen countertops or vanity tops can now be made from recycled paper coated in nontoxic sealant, waste such as plastic milk jugs, and glass that has been recycled or was left over from making windows.
- The 'g' Green Design Center in Mashpee Commons stocks bamboo bowls and bath towels, cornstarch flatware, biodegradable planters and lawn and leaf bags, and milk-paint furniture stain.

— KATHI SCRIZZI DRISCOLL

"Things are evolving fast.... In the last year, it's really picked up for the average, everyday consumer. I expected it would be a couple more years before it got to this level," said Jeff Rogers, founder of New England Green Building Center in Provincetown. "There was a general shift that I could see was coming, but Al Gore just put it over the top."

Green "is the big topic of conversation right now," said Michael Dingley, senior vice president of programming for HGTV, which is in the middle of a "green testing season" to see how much viewers want to hear about environmentally friendly practices. While officials there saw the trend coming in 2006, now "we're pitched 'green' every day, from producers all over the world."

Sure, not everyone is making changes for unselfish motives. In a winter of high gas and heating oil prices, more people are finding it's cheaper to go solar or drive a hybrid. And some energy-efficient home upgrades can win a federal tax credit, with the new Commonwealth Solar program offering state rebates to homeowners getting energy from the sun.

"It's not a political issue, it's an environmental issue," said Nicole Goldman, owner of 'g' Green Design Center in Mashpee Commons. "People think it doesn't address them, they think it's not affecting them, but as soon as they see it in their pocketbook, they wake up."

"The majority of Americans are usually motivated by, 'It's impacting me, OK, it's saving me money,' " Dingley said.

And, for some, there are health issues. Using chemical-free products can literally make a home's air cleaner to breathe.

That's not to say a world view, a desire to help "save the planet," plays no role in consumer choices.

"It's the impact on global warming and on consumption of foreign oil, both of which are big factors right now," explains Laela Sayigh of Woods Hole, whose family's home largely runs on solar energy and who recently bought a hybrid car. "We try to live in a way that can minimize both of those things."

"I look at the whole green movement as a way to save money as well as reduce your carbon footprint," said Scott Beels of Marstons Mills, who changed almost all of his home's light bulbs to compact fluorescents, uses a wood stove for part of his heating and last year bought a hybrid car. Going green, a little or a lot, he said, "is a great chance to not only save money, but to make a contribution."

"Green" may be a trend, but it's not a fad, emphasizes Goldman, who said it's a "moral imperative" to act now.

A growing trend

So how much are we paying attention to environmentally friendly living? Consider:

- The green building industry, barely a blip at the turn of the century, is now worth about \$12 billion annually, according to the U.S. Green Building Council.
- The number of building materials made with recycled content that can be found on the Internet has more than doubled in each of the last few years, according to store owners who seek out green building materials to sell.
- Close to 60 percent of consumers were taking steps in 2007 to make their home more environmentally friendly, according to an American Home Furnishings Alliance survey.

- By late 2007, more than half of National Association of Home Builders members — who build more than 80 percent of America's homes — were incorporating green practices into the development, design and construction of new homes, according to an association survey. About 20,000 homes a year are now built nationally using green guidelines.
- Last month, Congress and President Bush approved an energy bill that included increased efficiency standards for light bulbs, appliances and buildings — including the phasing out of incandescent light bulbs by 2012 in favor of compact fluorescent bulbs.
- Home Depot had a 30 percent increase in sales of Energy Star appliances in 2006 and sold more than 50 million compact fluorescent bulbs.
- HGTV has added a second home giveaway this year — a "green home" in South Carolina, designed to show "you don't have to be extreme to be green." Last year's main project on PBS's "This Old House" was a green remodel in Texas.
- Energy code changes adopted as part of the state building code at the start of this year include requiring a tighter "thermal envelope," or insulation, of a home, as well as more energy-efficient windows.
- Locally, Cape Cod Community College's Environmental Technology program will add a "sustainable design" course for builders, architects and homeowners next fall, and the Cape chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry's "green team" will begin offering information and education in March.

"It's definitely become more and more of a focus for the building industry," said Alison Alessi of A&E Architects Inc. in Brewster. "You hear green this, green that, especially in the last six months to a year. It's in every magazine."

Right at home

Nowhere has the idea of "green" made more of a personal impact than in home-related industries.

With homeowners wanting to make their dwelling and yards efficient and "friendly," the idea has reverberated from architects to construction crews to designers to landscapers.

"Homeowners are demanding more energy-efficient products and sustainable designs," said Kermit Baker, chief economist of the American Institute of Architects. "Structural insulation panels, geothermal heating and cooling systems, tankless water heaters, and green flooring products such as bamboo and cork are all in high consumer demand."

And suppliers say new products are being created every day.

Take your kitchen, for example: A survey by thisoldhouse.com last fall found cabinets of recycled wood pulp with non-formaldehyde glue; butcher block made from bamboo; pendant lights and backsplashes of recycled glass and aluminum; cabinet hardware of lead-free pewter and recycled-material eco-resin; and terrazzo flooring made from 90 percent recycled material.

Recycled materials are, in fact, a hot component of the green building movement — both from post-consumer waste, such as milk jugs and shampoo bottles, and post-production wastes, materials that weren't ever used, such as glass left over from window-making. Products include roofing tiles from recycled vinyl and cellulose and countertops of recycled newsprint.

Furniture displayed at a national market show last fall included steel springs made of 50 percent recycled metal; "organic" cotton fabric; and throw pillows with fibers from recycled soda bottles.

Both New England Green Building in Provincetown and 'g' in Mashpee sell insulation made of blue jeans. A fabric wallcovering recently cited by BuildingGreen Inc. is made from 100 percent recycled polyester. At

this month's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, manufacturers were talking about new products that don't waste as much electricity, are easier to recycle and even have components made of plants.

And if the environmental friendliness of their product doesn't go far enough, some manufacturers are getting proactive. Last fall, Vaughan-Bassett announced a plan to plant one tree for every tree it uses to produce furniture; the company estimated it would pay for 150,000 saplings each year.

"Green" standards

So what makes a home product "green"? There has been no strict definition for it, though regional and national standards in everything from electrical, water and chemical use to wood sustainability have recently been created or are now being formulated to help consumers make choices.

They'll need that help because, if the trend continues as experts predict, they will only have more products to choose from.

Last spring, Home Depot began putting its Eco Options designation on more than 2,000 new and existing products that have "less of an impact on the environment," including all-natural insect repellents, cellulose insulation, front-load washing machines, programmable thermostats and certified- sustainable wood products. Since then, the number of Eco Option products has risen to more than 2,800 and is growing — as is customer interest.

"People are catching on," said spokesperson Sheriee Bowman. "The small step is changing the light bulb. If they want to make a bigger impact, there are all sorts of ways they can do that."

And on a regular basis.

"We're hoping 'green' settles down and becomes not the exception, not something special," said Dingley from HGTV. "We believe it should be a part of everyday life."

Material from wire services contributed to this report.

On the Web

A sampling of sources for "green" information and products:

- www.usgbc.org, the site of the U.S. Green Building Council, which oversees the Green Building Rating System for homes and businesses
- www.nesea.org, the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association site includes a searchable database of "green" contractors and consultants
- www.cigogreen.org, a guide to sustainable living on Cape Cod and the islands, includes action plans, a "Green Pages" guide to local businesses and "Ask an Expert"
- www.greenhome.com, for "environmentally preferred" products
- www.greenhomeguide.com
- www.buildinggreen.com
- www.smartwood.org, about finding sustainably harvested wood
- www.dsireusa.org, state-by-state listings of rebates and tax credits for going green
- www.findyourfurniture.com, the American Home Furnishings Alliance site, includes consumer guidelines for distinguishing companies and items that follow "green" standards.

Home use

In the United States alone, buildings account for:

- 65 percent of electricity consumption
- 36 percent of energy use
- 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions
- 30 percent of raw materials use
- 30 percent of waste output (136 million tons annually)
- 12 percent of potable water consumption

Source: U.S. Green Building Council

America's

onboard

A national study last month conducted for HGTV and the Natural Resources Defense Council tested the U.S. public's sentiment about protecting the environment. Some findings:

- 84 percent of respondents believe "it is a moral obligation" to care for the environment.
- 86 percent already participate in at least one green activity, such as conserving energy at home, recycling, driving a fuel-efficient car, buying recycled products or picking up litter.
- 78 percent said they are "willing to make a lifestyle change for the good of the environment."
- 40 percent of consumers said they are more aware of environmental issues now than in 2006.