

# Home & Garden

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Edited by Sherry Thomas



**THE VIGNETTES:** This eco-kitchen features Silver Walker cabinets with 3-Form inserts and Extreme Concrete countertops from Meld USA.



**THE FURNITURE:** A mid-century Paul McCobb chair is reinvented with recycled fabric. Local artist Ted Harris made this lamp from a salvaged tripod.



**THE PRODUCTS:** These tiles are as eco-friendly as they are elegant, all manufactured from recycled glass, metal, terrazzo and terra cotta materials.

## Eco-Chic

How a downtown showroom plans to paint your home green.

**Growing up in** South Africa, the need to alleviate poverty and suffering became deeply embedded in Karen Kalmek's consciousness. So when she finally opened her Green Home Chicago showroom in Chicago's West Loop in February, the long-time Evanstonian (and former Glencoe resident) knew community-building would be integral to her business model.

All product lines carried at Green Home Chicago are categorized according to Kalmek's specialized "green" category system, which includes a "classification" for items that contribute to "community building/poverty alleviation."

Kalmek also strives for economic diversity, bringing in items across price points (from a few hundred dollars to more than \$10,000) to make green products available to a wider spectrum of buyers. And to take her socio-ecological mission one step further, Green Home Chicago has pledged 1 percent of its profits to

green-minded organizations (selected by its customers).

But as noble and good as all that is, what's luring in North Shore-area designers and consumers is the selection of luxurious, eco-friendly furniture, art and home-improvement items. Imagine walking into a high-end kitchen showroom, with all the Wolfs and Sub-Zeros, only to discover those beautiful countertops on display are not concrete but recycled products from Meld USA or the sustainable/green Syndecrete, which Kalmek says is "half the weight of concrete, but twice as strong." Using the product can add anywhere from two to eight LEED certification points to a project, which is as good as gold for a green builder. For more on Green Home Chicago and Kalmek's vision for an eco-revolution, turn the page to "Home Ecologics."

*Green Home Chicago is located at 213 N. Morgan St., Suite 1-D. For hours and information, call 312/432-9400 or go to [www.ghcdesigncenter.com](http://www.ghcdesigncenter.com).*





# HOME ECOLOGICS

From zero-VOC paint to eco-friendly furniture, a *North Shore entrepreneur* opens doors for the new *green economy*.

By Sherry Thomas • Photography by Katrina Wittkamp

**IN LAST MONTH'S FEATURE** on LEED certification and eco-friendly home building (*"The Green House Effect"*), veteran home décor writer Lisa Skolnik told us all to "think green."

This month, as we look inside those four walls to the very things we use and breathe in our homes every day, Green Home Chicago's Karen Kalmek is telling us to "think revolution."

She's serious about this, believes we're finally on the cusp of some kind of a 21st-century ecological sea change that could make solar power the new electricity, renewable resources and paints with zero volatile organic compounds (VOCs) as revolutionary as internal combustion.

"This is the new industrial age," says Kalmek, a South African native. "It's the new economy."

And if that indeed is the case, the long-time Evanstonian's West Loop showroom and design center (featured on page 57) may serve as the catalyst, the portal through which green innovation and progress can flow from obscurity to the mainstream market.

Virginia Young, cofounder and owner of YOLO Colorhouse, one of the zero-VOC paint manufacturers carried at Green Home Chicago, says when she and her business partner, Janie Lowe, started the company in 2005, it was more out of a selfish interest than entrepreneurial spirit. "We were living in Portland, and we were painters; we were feeling the effects of what the paint was doing to us," she explains. "We got into old recipes and started making clay paints. That was seven years ago when there were very few low-VOC products. And the ones that were out there, nobody was talking about color. At that time you made sacrifices if you wanted to be green."

Since then, the market has changed — dramatically.

As a now-famous line from a June 2006 article in *The Harvard Business Review* declared: "The green future is here."

"Green is beautiful," Young adds. "The products that are out there now are gorgeous. There is no sacrifice."



In fact, some designers are now throwing around the “L” word. Luxury.

Don’t believe it? Check out the \$10,500 credenza from the Talisman collection at Green Home Chicago, hand-crafted from flamed birch, a rare wood reclaimed from the depths of the Great Lakes, a species believed to be anywhere from 300 to 900 years old.

Then check out the kitchen displays with thick, gorgeously green Syndecrete and Meld USA counter tops, Silver Walker cabinets and luxury appliances (Sub-Zero, Wolf) supplied by Wisconsin-based Westye Group, a company endorsed by Kalmek for their eco-friendly business practices.

“They are local in terms of LEED (Leadership in Energy

and Environmental Design green building rating system) because they are within a 500-mile radius,” she explains. “And this Wolf stove is an induction cooktop, which is best in terms of energy efficiency.”

In the last year, the number of manufacturers who are taking measures to comply with LEED and green practices has skyrocketed, whether it’s the posh (and now carbon neutral) Montauk Sofa company, Benjamin Moore’s new low-VOC products, Kohler’s new high-efficiency products or Black & Decker’s “zero emissions” lawn products. Even Pottery Barn has created a substantial “eco-chic” line as well.

But sorting through what’s green or not green, or determining exactly how

This private-label line of eco-friendly children’s furniture is made with durable FSC-certified substrate veneers that are available in three colors. The paintings in the background are by Evanston artist Amy Woodbury.

green a product is, is a challenge in itself.

“There are a lot of self-standard seals of approval from the bigger companies,” Young explains. “The consumer has heard a lot from the press and wants to do the right thing, but there’s so much information, and it’s so overwhelming for consumers right now.”

In fact, it seems like almost everything these days is claiming to be organic or green, to the point that you almost need a checklist, which is what Kalmek attaches to each of her products at Green Home Chicago.

“It’s a can of worms in a way,” she explains. “It’s really hard to say what’s really green or not green.”

Kalmek’s “10-point green classification” system attempts to

show what makes an item “green.” The list includes: recycled content; non-toxic; sustainable/renewable resources; cradle to cradle (product that can be used, recycled and used again without losing any material quality); green manufacturing processes; certifications; artisanal/hand-made; community building/poverty alleviation; and vintage/reclaimed. We have a similar green-home “cheat sheet” on page 62, and there are more tomes on the subject being written as we type.

It’s a start. Just one drum beat on what is becoming a nationwide crescendo.

Yet according to Kalmek, there is still work to be done. Revolutionary work. Work that changes the way we think about manufacturing, trans-



One of the kitchen vignettes at Green Home Chicago features eco-friendly Syndecrete countertops, a Wolf range from Westye Group and stained bamboo cabinets from Silver Walker with linen-like 3-Form inserts.



The surfaces in this room are made of Syndcrete, a natural, sustainable, cement-based composite.

portation and the products we bring into our homes. "Now that there's some momentum, there's an incentive," she says. "For example, if we're all going to start installing solar panels, they need people to really learn the trade." Same goes for people who need to be LEED certified, or become zero-VOC experts, or master other technologies that are vital to the movement.

It would be nice to believe that this new green industry could change the direction of the economy, to serve as some sort of ecological revolution. That is still to be seen. However, the paradigm shift from a society of consumption to a society of consciousness is undeniable.

"Local to me is huge," Kalmek says. "I'm committed to helping local businesses, to helping people connect to each other, to build up what they do." Like Catherine McCulloch, a local architect who makes lamps: "I said to her, 'We're going to build your business.'" Or Ted Harris, the eccentric artist who's always calling her with refurbished finds, many reclaimed from area streets. Or the local furniture maker she is now searching for to create a custom line of green furniture at a better price point than the lines she now carries.

It may not be a revolution yet, but at the we're going, it very well could be.

# The (Unofficial) Green Home Cheat Sheet

By Lisa Skolnik

When computers became a household staple, we had to learn a new way of life. E-mail supplanted phone calls; e-commerce replaced mall shopping; the dating game got a new set of rules; and 'geek speak' gave new meaning to old familiar terms such as port, dock, spool, thread, hit, host and cookie. Our response to the rapidly changing environmental conditions of our world has evoked the same scenario. Green is a way of life instead of a color, and 'green speak' no longer refers to the double-talk of former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan. And making sense of all these concepts and terms can confuse and confound. For example, what do terms such as "green building" or "sustainability" really mean, and what do all those new acronyms like LEED, FSC, USGBC or CFL stand for? Volumes have already been written about the greening of our world and its concomitant lingo, but it takes time to look things up. So here's our cheat sheet on the basics you need to know as far as your home is concerned.

## 1. What does green building mean?

There's no such thing as a little bit pregnant, but there is such a thing as a little bit green. That's because the materials and technologies that go into green building yield varying returns in terms of cost (both to you initially, and in the operating savings you will reap) and impact (some will conserve more resources than others). So the bottom line — the fact that some materials and technologies are "greener" than others — makes picking and choosing from all the options that are available complicated and tricky.

Given all this variety, it is easy to understand why there is no one definition to explain the term "green," or why the term can mean different things to each of us. But generally, it is safe to say that green buildings or homes are "high-performance structures that are more environmentally responsible and healthier for the people inside," says Ashley Katz, a spokesperson for the U.S. Green Building Council (whose acronym, USGBC, is part of the newfangled alphabet soup of the green milieu).

Other definitions go further and mention that the design and construction of a green building takes a range of factors into account, from site location and planning to the technologies and materials that are used. Ultimately, the process must safeguard, conserve and make the most efficient use of all resources to yield structurally safe, environmentally healthy, satisfactorily comfortable and aesthetically pleasing buildings from cradle to grave ... meaning that resource consumption and pollution emissions count for the structure's complete lifecycle.

## 2. Why build green?

Building materials represent energy in terms of the resources it takes to make, transport and assemble them. And once a home is built, it consumes energy to keep its inhabitants comfortable. So the way we design our homes, and the materials we use to build them, has a significant impact on the environment because they use energy — lots of energy, in fact.

Of course energy consumption has a direct

influence on the quality of our environment, for it uses natural resources that may not be renewable, generates contaminants such as greenhouse gases and affects the inherent beauty of our surroundings.

Green buildings minimize the use of energy in myriad ways, starting with where they are built. The USGBC guidelines note that homes should be sited within easy walking distance of schools, stores, parks and public transportation and oriented to natural light. They should also conserve water and energy; be right-sized to avoid wasting space; employ renewable resources and vernacular styles that were developed in response to an environment's conditions; and more. (Find more guidelines and strategies at [www.greenhomeguide.org](http://www.greenhomeguide.org).)

## 3. How can I make my existing home more green?

Because the North Shore is a mature area, it is hard to resort to solar technology on many sites. "You can't install solar panels on a surface if there are trees blocking the light," notes Nate Kipnis of Nathan Kipnis Architects in Evanston. But there are plenty of things you can do to reduce your energy bills and conserve energy. Here's a short list of ideas that Kipnis recommends:

Call an energy rater to assess your house, determine weak spots and help you create a plan to address your weak spots. For raters, visit [www.ilenergyraters.org](http://www.ilenergyraters.org).

Many old homes (and even some new ones) have inadequate insulation. Look into adding more insulation to spots that are under-insulated, especially exterior walls and attics.

Replace single-pane windows or older double-glazed windows with tight, low-"e" glazed windows. Kipnis cautions against using vinyl, which is a petroleum-based material that violates the notion of sustainability.

Replace older appliances and systems such as high-water-volume faucets and toilets with new, energy-efficient ones such as low-flow faucets and dual-flush toilets.

When you redecorate, use sustainable materials such as no- or low-VOC paints and nontoxic floor finishes and eliminate wall-to-wall carpeting when possible, replacing it with hard surfaces that don't catch dust and mites.