

REMODELING? THINK GREEN

ADDRESSING AIR QUALITY GOOD PLACE TO START, EXPERT SAYS

BY DENISE DAVIDSON

Being environmentally responsible during a remodel takes a bit of planning and research. So we asked Lynne Mitschke, an energy and green-building consultant, how to get started. Mitschke has multiple green-rating certifications and works as a GreenPoint Rater and at the City of Chula Vista as a sustainability consultant for development services.

Q: Does an eco-remodel differ from a standard remodel?

A: The owner has introduced another set of criteria for the project. Some methods of construction and many products will be considered from that perspective.

Q: How do you choose materials wisely?

A: There are great resources available online such as Build It Green (builditgreen.org), Re-green (regreenprogram.org) and Department of Energy (energy.gov/public-services/homes).

Q: What are the environmentally friendly resources to use?

A: The first products to choose carefully are those that affect the indoor air quality of a home so flooring, paints and ventilation systems, which includes heating and cooling systems. I think that the occupant health and safety is the priority. The next considerations include conservation and utility savings. To save money on utilities, replace outdated plumbing fixtures, appliances and upgrade to LED lighting. To help with conservation efforts, recycle everything you can whenever you can.

Q: What are volatile organic compounds? And how important is ventilation?

A: VOCs are generally present in indoor products, such as paint, carpeting, vinyl flooring and upholstery, and foam. There are limits on their presence in products for sale in California. The chemicals can be irritants and/or health concerns, especially for children, the elderly and people



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This Pacific Beach remodel received a gold rating from the U.S. Green Building Council. Eco-friendly features include high-efficiency windows and efficient closed-combustion heating/cooling equipment plus a rain catchment system.

with allergies. Low- or no-VOC products are available, and they are the best choice.

Ventilation is very important. A balanced mechanical ventilation system, which supplies consistent fresh air, is the best choice.

Q: Are green materials expensive?

A: Superior products usually cost at least a little more. During the project planning process, the owner decides which products to prioritize and which to splurge on.

Q: Do tax breaks exist for an eco-remodel?

A: There are many rebates and incentives through San Diego Gas & Electric for remodeling or upgrading equipment.

Q: Where can I go to see an example of an eco-friendly home?

A: The San Diego Green Building Council will host the annual Green Homes Tour on November 12, 2016. (Visit usgbcsd.org/Committees/ResGB for details.) This is a very interesting tour because it's all over the county and a good variety of

houses: new or remodeled, multi-family, single family or some are just eco-friendly, eco-landscaped and other related things like that. Not all the houses are rated. Not all are GreenPoint Rated but have features that are eco-friendly.

Case studies are available on the builditgreen.org website. Another source is the San Diego Gas & Electric Energy Innovation Center on Clairemont Mesa Boulevard. They also have really good displays and information about rebates. They have a big display of a smart home. It's a really great place to visit just to start researching these things.

Q: What is the best room to remodel to become more environmentally mindful?

A: In terms of energy and water savings, the kitchen and bathroom are important.

Q: How can the remodel withstand the test of time and avoid fads?

A: Do the research, search online from reputable sources, ask around, and engage an eco-knowledgeable team for the project.

Q: Is reducing, reusing or recycling older materials worth the effort?

A: Waste management is crucial to any eco-friendly project.

Q: Do you have a favorite eco-remodel project you worked on?

A: I really liked this last one that just has been completed in Pacific Beach and has a gold certification. It was a remodel and small addition, and the owners were very involved and added their own artistic touches. The owners specified energy-saving appliances, high-efficiency windows and efficient closed-combustion heating/cooling equipment.

They were careful to select low-VOC and many no-VOC products for the interior including flooring, paint and cabinetry. They also installed a very nice rain catchment system with high-efficiency irrigation. Alliance Green Builders was a consultant and Katie Teare from AGB assisted me with the GreenPoint Rating process.

Denise Davidson is a San Diego freelance writer.