

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

The health and well-being of a home's occupants becomes just as important as the products one uses to protect the environment. At the beginning of any green remodel, homeowners should identify where potential problems could arise with molds and allergens and determine how to avoid bringing toxic chemicals into the living space.

Finishes

Adhesives, sealants and finishes have a significant impact on indoor air quality. Used in conventional cabinetry and flooring, they are often high in volatile organic compounds, VOCs. These compounds adversely affect the quality of any indoor environment because they off-gas toxic chemicals into the air, taking anywhere from several hours to several years to complete the harmful process.

Cabinets

Many manufacturers now offer cabinets with low-VOC and no-VOC products. One such company, Neil Kelly Cabinets, uses formaldehyde-free wheatboard case materials and sustainable wood harvested from managed forests. The finishes are low-VOC.



Terrazzo Countertop by EnviroGLAS®

Countertops

Choosing eco-friendly sustainable countertops is becoming easier, too. PaperStone™ and Richlite® make composite countertops from paper and plastic resins. Although Richlite® doesn't incorporate a high recycled content into its products, the manufacturer claims to utilize resources from sustainably managed forests. PaperStone™ uses a cashew nut oil-based resin to stabilize harmful VOCs, making

it a good choice for chemically sensitive people. Industry specialists often compare these surfaces to soapstone, and they will develop a patina over time.

Tile

Ceramic tile is a perfect alternative for the homeowner who likes a more traditional option. Ceramic is considered an environmentally friendly material due to its durability, longevity and relatively low VOCs, especially when it is made from high-recycled content like the tiles available from Crossville®. The company maximizes the use of natural gas and employs sophisticated dust collection systems and processes to reclaim and reuse most of the unfired raw waste material generated during manufacturing the tile. Crossville®



Cork flooring by Expanko

offers a wide variety of porcelain, glass and stone pieces in various colors and finishes to complement any style.

Terrazzo, a mosaic consisting of small pieces of marble or granite set in mortar, is now a hot trend in kitchen countertop design. Architects and designers can order 25-by-60-by-1 inch slabs from EnviroGLAS®. Made with 100 percent recycled glass, these popular countertops are available in eight glass options and customizable, pigmented epoxy resin.

Paint

Painting doesn't have to be a toxic experience either. Several companies have developed low-VOC paints in myriad designer colors as well as low-solvent paints to stop mold and mildew from growing on walls. The Portland, Oregon-based company YOLO Colorhouse produces eco-friendly paint and makes color selection a breeze with its poster-sized samples. Benjamin Moore® also offers a line of low-VOC paint with color samples homeowners can purchase in small plastic jars, eliminating the need for often-wasted quart-size samples.



Poster-sized paint samples from YOLO Colorhouse. Photo by YaM Studio