

Friday, August 24, 2007

Environmental decisions matter

Marie Snider

My husband designed our house 37 years ago.

Fortunately, he was very forward thinking.

He planned the house with many large picture windows that face the back of the lot.

Our living room has a very contemporary feel with a cathedral ceiling and a white limestone fireplace.

And at the same time as we built the house, he planted hundreds of bushes and trees on our property. Some died, but many lived.

As I'm writing this column, I can look through the forest of evergreens and get a glimpse of scarlet flowers on the trumpet vines that cover the arbor. Right now I can't see any hummingbirds, but I know they'll soon be back to sip the nectar.

We love our house and its surroundings — so much so that we hated to even think of redecorating and upsetting our comfortable routine. But a time comes when the couches sag, the paint looks dingy and the carpet has too many stains!

So, after 21 years, we finally decided to bite the bullet.

Then came the long process of decisions. What about the flooring? Should it be carpet? If so, should it be Berber, indoor-outdoor, plush, loop? Should it be wool or polyester?

Or should we consider cork or tile? Or hardwood or bamboo?

The whole process was fraught with difficult decisions, until finally we were ready to choose the paint for the living room. We knew what we wanted — just plain white!

But there was no "plain white." There was Bright White, Dove White, Reliable White, Panda White, White Duck, Vanilla and on and on. So with the help of our artist friend Bob and his wife Vernetta, we painstakingly chose Alabaster.

Still, as complicated as the process has been, there was one thing that drove all of our decision-making. We wanted a “green” house as much as possible.

“Green” in the sense of using renewable resources and replacing only what was necessary. And, especially, “green” in the sense of protecting the indoor air quality in the house.

Finally, after six months of study, we chose bamboo flooring and decided to dry-clean our 20-year-old drapes. And we chose a paint with low VOCs (volatile organic compounds) — a term I became very familiar with through my research, which translates into better indoor air quality.

We chose bamboo for a variety reasons. One reason was for its beauty. Another was for its long-term durability. And the most important reason was because of its “green” qualities.

Unlike red oak, which takes decades to mature, bamboo reaches maturity in five years.

And we chose Teragren brand bamboo for its stringent environmental standards, its formaldehyde-free flooring and its mission to reduce the dependence on dwindling timber resources.

All those months of research convinced us more than ever how important it is to protect our planet and our own health by making wise choices.

As the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy states: “In our every deliberation we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.”

Perhaps, if we make the right choices today, our great-great-grandchildren will still be able to enjoy some towering forests and unspoiled waterways.