

## ECO-CONSCIOUS

Ask the right questions, get the answers to honour the three Rs when renovating

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With the Home Renovations Show taking over Lansdowne Park this weekend, many are wondering how to make their renovation or new home project green friendly.

Not green as installing energy-efficient windows or mountains of insulation: those are givens. Rather, how do we make the process eco-conscious?

Steve Barkhouse, the green-bolstering president of Amsted Construction Ltd., suggests you start by questioning the need for a renovation. Maybe redesigning that mud room will solve your boot and mitt clutter.

If a renovation is still in the cards, Barkhouse says to fall back on the old saw, Reduce, re-use, recycle. Parts of this philosophy also applies to a new home.

## CREATIVE DESIGN

"A creative design will reduce the scope of work and materials," suggests Barkhouse. "It reduces the cost of the project, too. Sometimes you can reuse an old bathtub by refinishing it. Send old kitchen cabinets and plumbing fixtures to the ReStore (Habitat for Humanity's shops at 2370 Walkley Rd. and 7 Enterprise Rd.) or Cohen and Cohen (92 Bentley Ave.)." Or put an ad in the Citizen.

To follow the three Rs, you need your renovator and builder on side.

## WRITE IT DOWN

Write down what's environmentally important to you before talking to designers or contractors, and then grill the folks you're thinking about hiring. If off-gassing from particle board cabinets is a worry, ask how it's going to be handled. Sometimes the solution is as simple as painting the backs of cabinet doors.

What about paints, adhesives, sealants? Safer, low-volatile organic compound (VOC) products are available, but does the contractor know about and use them?

And just where will those not-quite-empty paint cans and caulking tubes wind up?

"One of the biggest factors in renovation is waste," says Patric Langevin, co-owner of Vert Design, an Ottawa green planning and design firm. "We include a set of notes on the drawings to help the contractor manage waste."

A current Vert Design project calls for an on-site wood chipper to turn lumber scraps into garden mulch.

Make sure your potential renovator factors environmentally responsible waste management costs into his estimate, adds Langevin. Otherwise, the bid to remain competitive might prompt him to ignore the eco-issue.

A good waste management plan adds roughly \$300 to the cost of a bathroom or kitchen renovation. This is a modest investment when you figure a bathroom renovation can generate up to four tons of waste.

Ask too about air quality during construction. Sealing off the work area with plastic and creating negative air pressure with a large fan exhausting through an outside door or window will mitigate dust problems inside your home. Cutting construction materials outside also helps.

Remember to consider bathroom moulds, asbestos in plaster or drywall, lead in paint or plumbing. If dislodged during construction, how will they be contained and disposed? Will the renovator measure air quality before and after the project to ensure your family's well-being?

## CONSIDER LOCAL PRODUCTS

Consumers have responsibilities.

Bamboo flooring may be the green rage just now, says Barkhouse, but you might think about transportation costs from a Brazilian plantation (has old-growth forest been sacrificed for a fast-buck cash crop?) to a Chinese factory (and how young are those factory hands, anyway?) to Canada.

Could be maple from a sustainably managed forest -- a Forest Stewardship Council stamp will assure you of that -- within 160 kilometres of your home makes more environmental sense.

You'll also want to ensure that building materials, including batt insulation and drywall, contain a good chunk of recycled material.

To bring yourself up to speed on green building matters, pick up a copy of Green Building Products: The GreenSpec Guide to Residential Building Materials, edited by Alex Wilson and Mark Piepkorn. Published by New Society Publishers, it's a great resource. It's available at [amazon.ca](http://amazon.ca).

You should also hire only professionals, says Barkhouse, preferably those registered with the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association's Renovators Council and the Green Home Building Committee.

And when your prospective renovator has finished his sales pitch, says Barkhouse, "pull out that list and ask yourself, 'Has he answered all my questions?'"