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KITCHEN collaboration

THE KITCHEN IS SAID TO BE THE MOST RENOVATED ROOM IN THE HOUSE, SO HOW CAN YOU REDUCE THE IMPACT OF UPDATING THE HEART OF THE HOME?



The doors in this kitchen by Kitchen Connection are in Licorice Linea laminate from The Laminex Group's Greenfirst product range. Photograph: Clive Buxton.

The kitchen is no longer the utilitarian workspace it once was. These days, the kitchen is often the focal point of the home, inviting socialising, cooking and family dining into its space.

Druce Davey, designer at Brisbane outfit Greener Kitchens, says this is all the more reason people should pay careful attention to how green their kitchen is. "People spend so much time in the kitchen, you want to get it right!" he says.

FOOTPRINT

Jennifer Roberts, author of *Good Green Kitchens*, says the size of your kitchen is important. "It takes more resources to build, furnish and maintain a large kitchen than a smaller one," she explains. "Design your new kitchen so it's not overly large. Chances are a more modest kitchen will be more efficient and enjoyable to work in, too."

Druce Davey agrees. "Every cupboard saved is a win for the environment," he says. He has a range of strategies to make the maximum use of space within the kitchens he designs for his clients, foremost among them being a liberal use of drawers. "Once you use drawers, the storage capacity of a normal cupboard increases by at least 30 per cent," he says. "In a four-drawer unit it increases by about 50 per cent. You can get a lot more into a cupboard that has drawers in it than you can in a normal cupboard that has the middle shelf."

Minimising the size of the kitchen also saves on the cost of materials, with at least 50 per cent of the kitchen being the carcass, or underlying framework of the cupboards and other cabinetry.

THE CARCASS

Selection of the right materials for the carcass can have a big impact on the environment. Many carcasses are made from wood or chipboard. But Peter Daly, director of Cantilever Interiors, prefers plywood. "Plywood is a pine that comes from a managed forest," he explains. "It is a lot





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Clockwise from top left: The Bokashi bucket suits apartment dwellers; Made Living uses the most eco-friendly products and production methods including Forest Stewardship Council certified timbers (photo: Sharyn Cairns); drawers increase storage and Made Living's peg inserts secure the contents; Kitcheners Kitchens only uses timber from regrowth forests. The company offsets all its carbon emissions.



more sustainably harvested than chipboard, which is pulped-down miscellaneous product, which I don't think anyone knows where it comes from. So you could have old-growth forest going into chipboard."

Plywood is more expensive than traditional materials, such as melamine, but it will last longer. At the very least, Peter recommends renovators should seek out cabinetry with an Eo (low emission) rating. There are Eo versions of MDF, plywood, chipboard and laminates. They all release no volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which are gases that have been linked to cancer and respiratory problems.

Gail Sullivan, National Marketing Manager for Kitchen Connection, says some of the products they have on offer to customers seeking a greener kitchen have Eo ratings and are accredited by the Good Environmental Choice Australia label. She says even good old Laminex has hit the 21st century with a greener option that is lowVOC and contains no formaldehyde, a chemical that can irritate and cause cancer.

If in doubt with wood products, Peter Daly advises to ask whether it is Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified. This is an accreditation scheme that aims to promote timber industry companies that manage forests in a sustainable manner. If suppliers don't know whether wood is FSC certified, savvy renovators should seek another product, he says.

CLEANING

How you will keep your kitchen clean is worth considering if you are wanting to go green, according to Gail Sullivan. For example, she says, some rangehoods have filters that can go in the dishwasher. "You should try to look for options that can go in your dishwasher or are cleanable with soapy water rather than corrosive chemicals," she says. "An easy-clean option, basically."

Dishwashers are also not the environmental bad guys they once were, with researchers at the University of Bonn in Germany finding that modern, energy- and water-efficient dishwashers fully loaded are less damaging to the environment than people washing up by hand.

WASTE

The kitchen is also the place where most of the household's waste is generated. Gail Sullivan says it's important to have the bins set up so that recycling and reusing is as simple as possible. Placing the food scraps bin, for example, in the natural path between dinner table and dishwasher means it becomes effortless to send the scraps to the worms, the compost or the Bokashi bucket.

LIGHTING

A kitchen will always need to be well lit, both for safety reasons and for useability. Druce Davey recommends





From left: CaesarStone® offers environmentally sound benchtops with its Mosaici recycled stone surfaces; Greener Kitchens advocates compact, ergonomically designed kitchens made from quality materials. (photo: Julia Hennock).



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minimising wall cupboards wherever possible so that natural light is allowed to flood the space. Traditionally, the kitchen sink has gone next to the window so that the person doing the dishes has the benefit of natural light while chained to the sink. But with the increasing popularity of dishwashers, that need has been reduced.

Druce recommends putting the workbench next to the window; he is even keen to have the stovetop next to an opening window to minimise the need for an exhaust fan. Unlike the lounge room or bedrooms, the kitchen is one place where task lighting is appropriate, but remember that halogen lights are not the environmental saviours they are cracked up to be. Many 50W halogens are needed to light the area that one 40W compact fluorescent can illuminate.

FUTURE-PROOFING

Ultimately, says Druce Davey, the key to a green kitchen is future-proofing — designing your kitchen to last so

you are not wasting materials by renovating your kitchen every few years. “The greenest kitchen is the one you already have,” he says.

Along the same lines, Jennifer Roberts notes that keeping your kitchen carcass and simply updating the cupboard doors and benchtops is a great green way of renovating your kitchen. Among Druce Davey’s arsenal of tricks to make a kitchen last longer than the usual 10 or 15 years is using quality materials and designing kitchens for good ergonomics. “We talk to clients in their 40s and try to imagine what they will need when they’re in their 70s,” he says.

And he ignores colour fads and sticks to a classic palette sure to withstand the test of time. “If you can design a kitchen that has a colour palette that will last longer, you’re not going to replace it in 15 years because you can’t stand that burnt orange or lime green any more,” he says. So, ironically, some of his greenest kitchens are not actually green at all. **ca**

SAVE ENERGY

How energy-efficient your kitchen is will depend a lot on the appliances you choose. Look for the energy rating stars to guide you as to how power-hungry your fridge and oven are. An efficient appliance might cost you more at the outset, but will recoup those costs within a short time. Check out www.energyrating.gov.au for more information.

Here are some other energy-saving tips.

- ◆ Keep your fridge and oven separate so that heat from the oven doesn’t overwork your fridge.
- ◆ Keep your fridge well ventilated and your oven well insulated.
- ◆ Consider putting a grille under your fridge to draw in cool air from under the house.
- ◆ Choose gas over electricity because gas has a lower greenhouse impact.
- ◆ If you like to use them, microwave ovens are an energy-efficient way of cooking because, although they use a lot of power, it’s only for short bursts.

