Going Green in the Kitchen

Environmental issues are becoming more of a concern and we are frequently asked what people can do to make their new kitchen more environmentally friendly.

Green Companies – Look for companies with an environmental policy and ensure their suppliers are eco friendly too. If every company in the chain of supply of your kitchen has taken an environmental stand the carbon footprint of your kitchen will be substantially reduced.

Green Design – By optimising natural light in the kitchen the designer can cut back on the amount of lighting you will require. Look to place key work areas like sinks and stoves near a source of natural light. Ensure lighting is low voltage or uses energy saving bulbs. Include practical recycling bins that will allow you to separate your recyclable waste easily. Look to include a waste disposal system or green bin for biodegradable waste that can be turned into compost.

Green Materials – Specify that you wish your carcasses to be made of A rated or E1 board. This will be slightly more expensive but is manufactured in a 'greener' process and contains less formaldehyde than other boards. MDF is the board of choice for manufacturing doors and drawer fronts. There is a new range of MDF which is produced to a specification called Carb 2 which has harsher formaldehyde and hazardous emissions limitations than the current E1 emission standard. This MDF is considered a green product.

If you are looking for a paint finish or 'duco' door ensure the paint used is water based and environmentally friendly. There have been huge strides in the manufacturing process of PVC if opting for a wrap door. Many studies view PVC as an eco-friendly plastic with huge sustainability due to its durability and long life cycle.

Bamboo has multiple uses. It is grown in commercial plantations using sustainable forestry practices. The plants require no fertilizers or pesticides. Unlike other hardwoods the bamboo tree is not killed when it is harvested. The plant has multiple stems and only the mature stems are harvested leaving the plant alive to grow further stems. A bamboo plant absorbs more CO^2 during its growth than is released during the manufacturing process of bamboo boards and flooring. This means that bamboo products actually have a net positive carbon footprint.

Choose an eco friendly top. Engineered stone is a composite of stone fragments and resin and is considered a recycled material. In Europe and the United States there is also a paper based material available which is made from post-consumer waste, recycled paper and propriety, and petroleum free resin. This has been used very successfully in a work top application and should be available in South Africa soon.

If you wish to stick with a laminated top then look for a 'hollow core' top. This is a top that has a hollow core which is strengthened with recycled paper product. It is light weight and durable and uses far less raw material to manufacture.

Green Appliances – Appliances are the largest consumer of electricity and water in your kitchen. All appliances are given an energy rating based on their energy and water consumption.

Save electricity on your hob by matching the pan to the element size this could stop you loosing over 40% of the heat generated by the element. Look into new

cooking technology like the induction hob which, by creating a magnetic field between hob and pan, is faster and more fuel efficient than other options.

A convection oven is usually more energy saving than a conventional as the fan reduces the temperature required and cooking time by about 20%.

With dishwashers look for the most water-efficient model that offer a no-heat drying cycle.

Side by side fridges/freezers use more energy than similar sized models with the freezer on top. Ice makers and through the door bars also add to the units energy consumption. Always check your fridge's door seals. If these are not sealing properly you will be losing cold air which will mean the unit's compressor will have to work overtime to maintain the temperature inside.

In general front loading washing machines use less energy and water than top loading ones. Some new top loaders which have a facility to spray the clothes from above. These are more energy conscious than the older designs.

Green living – Look after the kitchen to ensure its longevity. Recycle, turn off appliances at the wall and switch off your kitchen lights when you are not in the kitchen. Being green may cost a little more in the beginning and demand a little more effort in the your day to day routine but in the long run it will save you time, money and will leave us with a healthier planet.

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