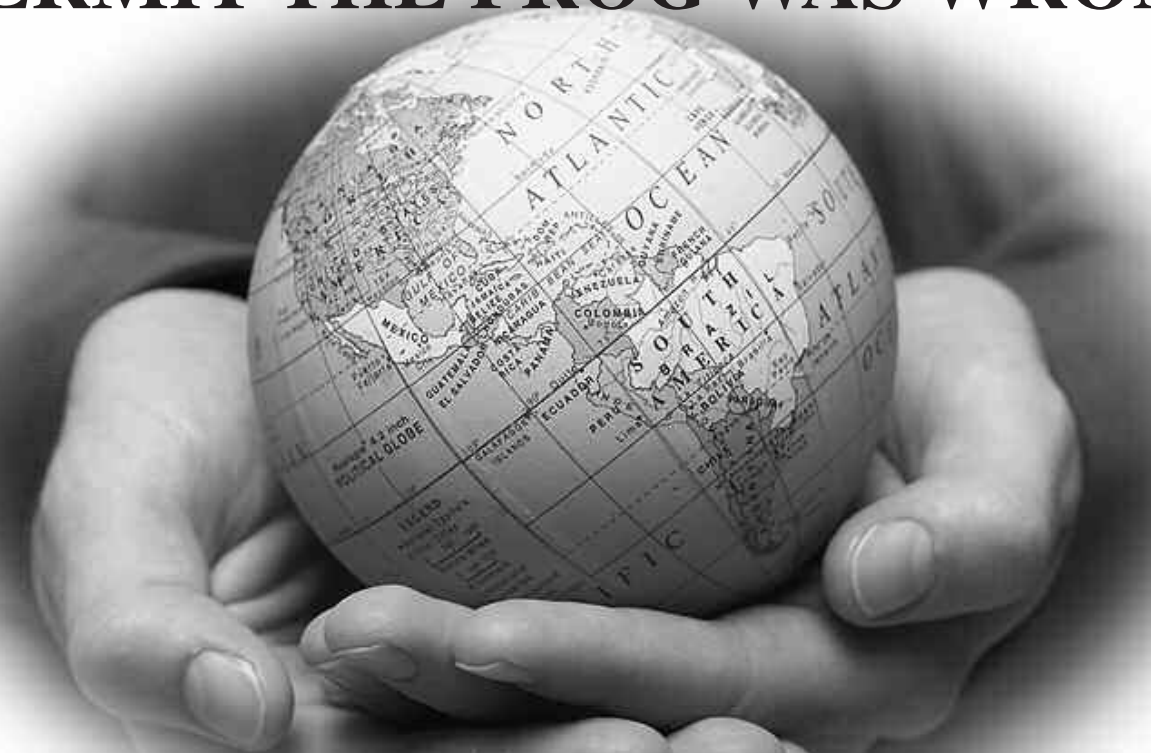


KERMIT THE FROG WAS WRONG



It Is Easy Being Green

At its core, green remodeling reduces the environmental impact on energy, water, material consumption, waste generation and harmful emissions, both indoors and outside

By Matt Austin, Mason Law Firm

Recently, we have been inundated with news that the real estate market continues to decline every month, new homes are no longer being built and people are spending what money they have left on remodeling their current homes instead of buying new ones. My wife and I are two of those people – sort of. We purchased an older home in December 2007 and just completed 18 months of renovating it to match our lifestyle and specifications.

So, as not to mislead you, we did not perform the renovations ourselves. Although my wife, (who is infinitely more handy around the house than I am) painted most every wall, many ceilings, all of the wood trim throughout the house, hung lights and installed door knobs and faucets, etc. I brought her flowers, poured her wine, and rubbed her aching muscles.

Through this process, we learned an incredible amount of information about renovating. The most surprising lessons were how easy it is to incorporate environmentally friendly elements into both our remodeling efforts and our daily lives.

Going Green Is Not Difficult or Costly

The National Association of Remodeling Industry (NARI), a professional association whose members voluntarily subscribe to a strict code of ethics, says “Green remodeling is beneficial because it results in lower operating costs for the home, increased comfort and resale value, healthier living, less maintenance and higher durability.”

NARI’s GreenRemodeling.org website is one of most extensive sources of information on green remodeling on the Internet, and NARI can identify and recommend a green

remodeler for homeowners across the country through its local chapters. One such contractor, Bill Nicholson of Nicholson Builders, says that green remodeling has increasingly become a focus of the work his clients want done on their homes. According to Bill, “homeowners can pretty much make every part of their home more environmentally friendly, and many contractors who specialize in this area continually receive additional education and training that we then pass onto our clients.”

At its core, green remodeling reduces the environmental impact on energy, water, material consumption, waste generation and harmful emissions, both indoors and outside on many of the estimated one million home remodeling projects each year, and homeowners who choose to remodel green can lower their energy consumption by 30-50%.

Green products are available for most any daily needs and have various beneficial effects. They are energy or water efficient. They use healthy, non-toxic materials. They are made from recycled or renewable sources. They make current products you use more efficient or more durable. They are recyclable or biodegradable.

Below are specific ways you can help conserve the environment, modernize your home and ultimately save money in both materials and energy consumption.

Inside Your Home – All About The Air

Your HVAC system should have at least a bi-annually checkup to make sure it's running efficiently. Also, install a programmable thermostat that allows you to cool or heat the whole house or individual rooms at different times, as necessary. These are extremely inexpensive, can be purchased at any hardware store, installed in less than half an hour and will immediately begin paying for themselves through lower utility bills.

According to the EPA, the air inside your home could be up to five times more polluted than the outside air. Air purifiers help clean the air by capturing microscopic contaminants and many new air conditioning manufacturers provide HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filtration systems built into the duct work.

Appropriate ventilation is also critical to suck bad air out of your home and bring fresh air in. Exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms remove odors, bacteria, humidity and cut down on mold growth. They also greatly neutralize major polluting contributors like tobacco smoke, smoke from the burning of wood, coal, or kerosene, toxic fumes from sealants or chemicals from cleaning products, lead paint, asbestos from insulation, damp carpets or fabrics and certain pressed-wood furniture products that release chemicals into the air.

Despite all this talk about letting air get out, make sure to plug air leaks! Leaky windows, doors, fireplaces, light switches and ceiling lights negate many of the benefits of a programmable thermostat. Sealed leaks also prohibit excess dust and allergens from entering your house. Lastly, make sure the attic entrance is sufficiently sealed so when doors and windows open and close the change in air pressure doesn't suck attic debris into your living area.

Use products that don't give off volatile organic compounds (VOC). And you thought everything organic was good! Low-or-no-VOC products greatly improve your indoor air quality and protect your health. Look for low-VOC paints and cleaning products. VOCs are emitted by a variety of home improvement products, including paints,

lacquers, paint strippers, cleaning supplies, pesticides, building materials and furnishings. VOCs pollute indoor air and have adverse health effects.

What About Water and Wood

Water quality is a precious resource. Instead of drinking water from plastic water bottles, use a water filtration system that removes sediment and chemicals from tap water. Install aerators, available for a few dollars at home supply stores, to sink faucets and change to low-flow showerheads. And, of course, use appliances that are ENERGY STAR qualified.

Flooring choice is also important. For some, carpet is an allergy trigger. Instead, use environmentally preferable and rapidly renewable wood alternatives such as linoleum, bamboo, recycled-content tile or non-VOC carpet. Choose wood products from sustainably managed forests, like those certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. And use locally sourced products when possible to reduce carbon emissions from transporting products.

Endless Electricity

With green power, you do not have to change your electricity provider. Instead, customers just pay a premium on their electricity bills to cover the extra cost of purchasing clean, sustainable energy. Contact the U.S. Department of Energy or AEP for more information.

Switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs. CFLs are a huge energy saver and have a much longer life than other bulbs. Lighting represents nearly 20% of a home's energy consumption and changing five of the most frequently used bulbs in a home can save \$100 per year on electric bills.

Today, a home's entertainment system goes far beyond a television and stereo player, and electronics manufacturers provide consumers with green alternatives. For example, flat screen LED TVs are ENERGY STAR qualified, provide 40% more energy efficiency than LCDs, have energy savings modes and are lead and mercury free. Surround sound speakers have energy efficient amplifiers that go into sleep mode when the system is idle, and they are free of lead, cadmium and mercury. Computer networking products reduce power consumption up to 80% over previous models and also are lead and mercury free.

Outside Your Home

Solar power technology that uses solar cells or solar photovoltaic arrays to convert light from the sun directly into electricity or heat saves energy costs for many homeowners. The U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy can help you find the right

solar solutions for you. But be careful, Ohio is one of the worst states for solar power in the country!

When landscaping, use native plants and avoid high-maintenance landscaping. Native plants have adapted to our local soils and climate over thousands of years. They need less water, fertilizer and pesticides. The Environmental Protection Agency has additional information on green landscaping techniques.

Where to Begin

Many people don't know where to begin. They have no idea if their home leaks air or what plants are native to central Ohio. At a minimum, you should have an energy audit conducted on your home. For a few hundred dollars, a professional will identify where you are losing energy costs – literally throwing money out of the window or flushing it down the toilet!

For those more ambitious remodelers, the United States government currently provides tax credits for energy efficient upgrades. Tax credits up to \$1,500 are provided to cover 30% of the purchase price of new energy efficient windows, air conditioners, water heaters, and insulation. Generally to qualify, the product must be 15%-20% more efficient than standard models. But, whether somethings qualify is a bit tricky, so check out www.energystar.gov for accurate, updated information on the tax credit.

Whatever level of greening you do to your home, all of us will be better off for it.

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