More than a trend

Creating eye-opening eco-friendly interiors By Sharon Verbeten

Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* may have brought global warming to the nation's consciousness. But while the ensuing interest in "going green" may be today's buzzword, experts believe sustainability will be – and must be – more than just a trend, especially when it comes to creating eco-friendly offices.

"It's far more than a trend," says Amanda Saylor, an interior designer and LEED-accredited professional at Hoffman LLC, a planning, architectural and construction management firm in Appleton. "There's really no reason any business can't think sustainably."

Steve Dunn, co-founder of Innovative Sustainability for Organizations (ISO Inc.) in Appleton, agrees. "It's the hot word right now, but I think it's going to have to be the norm. It's about the economics, the people, the planet – you're looking at all three. You're doing it because it makes business sense."

MAKING SENSE OF THE GREEN SCENE

Some offices have used sustainable practices, such as recycling, for years, but others are just dabbling with ways to help both the corporate environment as well as the planet.

"The demand is growing," Dunn adds. "Overall awareness of environmental impact is coming front and center." That's especially true in an age of rising energy costs – which has helped quantify why such changes may be necessary and fiscally responsible.

"I don't talk about it in terms of 'going

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TOP: The walls in this office at Hoffman LLC are made of multi-purpose, rapidly renewable cork wallcovering. The room also includes a CO^2 monitor to control fresh air delivery in a high occupancy zone.

ABOVE: This open space in the Hoffman office shows good use of natural daylight. Fluorescent lights are set on a daylight sensor to save energy. In addition, the concrete is stained with water-based color, and the carpet tile has recycled backing.

ABOVE LEFT: Reused cubicles are an efficient way to furnish an office. The lighter panels at far left are crafted from sunflower hulls.

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green,'" says Dunn. "You always have to tie it to the bottom line."

Once business owners realize that eco-friendly measures can save money in the long run, they may be more willing to consider them.

At ISO, for example, Dunn and his business partner, Paul Linzmeyer, used such principles in their 350-square-foot office. "We took an existing old office that was in need of something to renovate it and make it workable to move in, so we decided to do it in a green manner," Dunn says. They considered everything – from wall surfaces, paint and flooring to lighting, HVAC systems and furniture.

"You have to have an open mind at looking at things," Dunn suggests.

"It's really creating a whole new consciousness about things," Linzmeyer adds.

THE FIRST STEPS

According to the experts, here are a few ways business owners can begin creating an eco-friendly office:

RECYCLE: Provide recycling containers throughout the office and educate staff about their use. "Take five to 10 minutes to explain to your workers," Saylor advises. "If people know how to do it, they'll do it." She also suggests providing products, such as paper cups, made with recycled material. "Always try to look for things that contain recycled content," she says.

Dunn adds that something as simple as having internal documents printed on both sides can save both money and paper.

RETHINK: Changing the way people think about "business as usual" can also help. "You look at what's turned on, what's turned off," Dunn says, mentioning that things like computers and lights should be turned off at night.

Saylor suggests adding energy-efficient lighting systems (such as incorporating photo sensors or switching to all fluorescent lighting).

REUSE: Buying furniture and materials made of eco-friendly materials used to be a challenge, but it's getting easier now that there are "whole industries built around the concept of green," Dunn says.

But don't overlook used materials. "Reuse is definitely the most eco-friendly thing you can do," Saylor says. She advocates finding creative uses for old items, such as repurposing old office doors as desks. "It depends on where your business mindset is."

RENOVATE: Some eco-friendly measures can affect both the look and health of an office. Dunn and Linzmeyer, for example, replaced old carpet with recycled carpet squares. They also repainted with non-VOC paint, which doesn't release chemicals into the atmosphere.

Saylor adds that switching to low-flow plumbing fixtures, which change the pressure and use less water, can save tons of money in the long run, even though it may cost a bit more up front. "It pays for itself over its lifetime," she says.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Most experts agree that researching eco-friendly options is the best place to start, especially when business owners realize that the cost may not be as great as some may think.

"In 99 out of 100 cases, it's not going to cost you more," says Dunn. "Then you start looking at the intangibles. It will resonate with people."

Linzmeyer goes one step further. "We need to understand that we're part of a global community, and we need to play our part."

CLOSER LOOK

Recycle, reuse . . . redecorate!

Creating art from discarded items is nothing new. But instead of finding such creative concoctions only at arts and crafts shows, or hanging in someone's cottage, they're now becoming a part of office chic. At the offices of ISO Inc. on the 10th floor of the Zuelke building in downtown Appleton, you'll find bookshelf ledges and tabletops decorated with mosaics made from broken ceramic tiles.

"Some of the pieces I have introduced into the office are items I have rescued from other sources to give them new direction, new life," says artist Jeannie Linzmeyer, whose husband, Paul, is one of the founders of ISO (Innovative Sustainability for Organizations).

"I've been really conscious and cognizant of using eco-friendly materials," says Linzmeyer. "It's the right thing to do to be as green as you can; it's a tremendous savings."

In addition to acquiring the broken ceramic tiles that were headed for the trash heap, Linzmeyer also purchased items from thrift shops and garage sales, including used furniture that she refinished and repainted. She also made picture frames out of wine corks.

Paul Linzmeyer notes that the carpet is made of 70 percent recycled materials, and that all the paint and chalk are VOC free. Total trash from the remodeling project was 42 pounds, he says. All else was recycled, including doors and lumber that were donated to Habitat for Humanity.

ABOVE: Paul and Jeannie Linzmeyer decorated the ISO offices on the 10th floor of Appleton's Zuelke building with recycled materials. **RIGHT:** Jeannie decorated an existing shelf with broken tile she purchased at low cost from Lowe's, which she says took her idea nationwide and now sells broken tile in its stores.

MARGARET LEBRUN

Linzmeyer adds that the artwork is just one component of the entire sustainability package. "When you talk about sustainability, it's really about looking at everything," he says.

The artwork just pulls the entire office together, he says. "You're combining form and function and art together to create an image." - *Sharon Verbeten*