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When it comes to green decor, less is more

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You know what they say about one person's trash being another person's treasure. Well, Éco-Réno has turned that old adage into a flourishing business that takes salvaged architectural materials from homes being renovated and sells them back to people who are smart enough to recognize their value.

But it's about more than just finding a gem in a jumble of discarded clawfoot bathtubs, crown mouldings or glass doorknobs; the philosophy behind Éco-Réno is that salvaged items can and should be reused. It's a philosophy that is resonating more and more with people who are keen to renovate and decorate their homes in a way that is kinder to the environment.

What with the housing boom in the last few years, there's no shortage of houses that are being renovated and restored, and this has proved a boon for Éco-Réno, said Bruno Gariepy, the store's general manager. Plus, popular home-renovation programs like the French TV show *Les artisans du rebut* global and HGTV's *Junk Brothers* are showing people just how easy and effective it is to reuse salvaged materials.

In just the last few years, Éco-Réno has seen its clientele jump 25 per cent, and it is mostly young professionals, Gariepy said.

"These people learned how to recycle in kindergarten, so when it comes to building or renovating their house, they want to find stuff that they can salvage."

Christopher Sweetnam-Holmes agrees that people these days want to feel they're living a lifestyle that is generally easier on the environment. Sweetnam-Holmes is the co-founder of Eco-Cité, a national eco-development and consulting group that encourages others to adopt a greener, healthier approach to building.

Eco-Cité is set to begin construction this spring on a condo complex in Verdun that will include a 100-per-cent energy self-sufficient building, meaning its occupants will have zero energy costs. And while the idea of no more heating or electricity bills is highly attractive, Sweetnam-Holmes said it's about more than just saving a few dollars.

"What is most important to people is the idea that they're saving energy and being responsible, not necessarily how much (money they're saving)," he said.

For Julie Jonas, it goes further than just being environmentally responsible. Jonas is co-owner of Montreal-based Zia and Tia Pure Luxury Organics, an online retailer that sells everything from organic vegan sweets to eco-friendly toys, and organic furniture and furnishings. Jonas only sells products from vendors who she believes have integrity and a purpose that goes beyond just making a profit.

"Supporting companies that are doing something meaningful is really important to us," she said.

Jonas contributes a portion of every sale from Zia and Tia to Half the Sky Foundation, an organization in China that enhances the prospects for orphans who remain in Chinese orphanages, and Trees for the Future, an organization that helps communities around the world plant trees.

"We're not just selling products that are good for the Earth, but we're donating a percentage of money so (these organizations) can continue to do their work," she said.

Zia and Tia offers a line of certified organic and hemp furniture constructed with wood frames from sustainable forests, legs from reclaimed wood, non-toxic fasteners and finishers, and natural latex.

"People still think that organic is 'hippy dippy,' but the stuff that is out there is just stunning," Jonas said. "You cannot believe the quality." Increasingly though, people are becoming more educated about everything green, she added.

Sweetnam-Holmes agrees. "Public awareness of issues around green housing and the possibility of what can be done is just growing so rapidly in Quebec right now that people are really eager for it and you can see that being responded to in the marketplace," he said.

But while standard suburban builders are now offering options that are greener than they used to be, the increasing public interest in green products is yet to be fully matched by home-renovation suppliers, he added.

"We often get contractors calling us because their client wants to have an ecological finish on the floor and the contractor is in a panic because he doesn't know where to get it," said Jason Hughes of Co-op La Maison Verte, one of the few places in Montreal that carries ecological wood finishes from companies like Eco House and Eco Selection.

But big-box retailers are catching on.

A couple of years ago, Home Depot launched Eco Options, which includes many of the eco-friendly elements that Sweetnam-Holmes advocates like low-flow toilets, FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified wood flooring, zero VOC (volatile organic compound) paint, and heat-recovery ventilators.

Many of these products were available as long as seven years ago, explained Sylvio Pinal, divisional sales merchant for Home Depot Quebec, but now the company is making a more concerted effort to promote them.

"At first we had no stickers to identify those products, but now we do," Pinal said. "A customer can walk down the aisle and see what we have in terms of eco-option items."

What's more, he said, all Home Depots in Quebec now have a section for recycling paint.

"It's a big concern for the customer, so it's a big concern for Home Depot," Pinal said.

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Looking to buy some green furnishings for your home? Here are a few places you can start:

Co-op La Maison Verte

5785 Sherbrooke St. W.

Phone 514-489-8000

www.cooplamaisonverte.com

Carries:

- Quirky recycled furnishings like wine racks and CD racks made from old U.S. Army munitions boxes; clocks made from recycled record albums; CD racks and candelabras made from recycled bike parts; and hot plates made from recycled corks;
- A drainless composting toilet that evaporates up to six litres of waste a day;
- Doulton ceramic water filters that remove lead and chlorine from water; and
- Ecological floor finishes by Eco House and Eco Selection.

Éco-Réno

6631 Papineau Ave.

514-725-9990

www.ecoreno.com

Carries: salvaged doors, windows, mouldings, hardware, bathtubs, sinks, and more.

Home Depot

various locations (check phone book or Internet for one nearest you)

www.homedepot.ca

Carries: heat-recovery ventilators; low-flow showerheads and toilets; energy-efficient lightbulbs and fixtures; low VOC paint; FSC-certified wallpaper; FSC-certified wood flooring and lumber; and more.

Zed Recyclage Décoratif

514-264-0264

www.zedrecyclagedecoratif.com

Designers Elise and Marie-Sophie Thibault use architectural elements from salvaged wood to create decorative furniture and furnishings.

Products are sold at Coccinelle Jaune, 4236 Ste. Catherine St. E., and at Éco-Réno, 6631 Papineau Ave.

Zia and Tia Pure Luxury Organics

514-783-9995

www.ziaandtia.com

Carries: organic couches, beds, chairs & furnishings; recycled chandeliers; organic mattresses and bed covers; eco-friendly kids furniture; organic baby beds and bedding; and more.

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