



BUILD TO LAST

Making more sustainable choices when redecorating your home can boost your health as well as your eco-credentials

BY ANNABEL NOURSE



OPPOSITE PAGE

Tu cushions, available in Tree, are made from organic cotton fabrics and printed with water safe inks.

THIS PAGE

Ferum dining table and matching chairs from Tree



GREEN LIGHT

Sustainability is not a feature immediately associated with stylish design but that has been changing rapidly over the last five years or so.

Henning Voss started Provest Holdings, a boutique Hong Kong-based property developer, seven years ago and focused mainly on renovating older apartments in Central and Sheung Wan in a sustainable and sophisticated way.

He has just launched sister company Vivid Living to take this one step further. The firm creates visually stunning living and working environments that are designed using medical evidence to have a positive impact on your health and wellbeing.

“Everybody in Hong Kong knows about air pollution but what a lot of people are not aware of is that indoor air pollution levels are often two to five times higher than outdoors,” he explains.

“Sustainable homes are healthier because green building materials emit few, if any, toxins such as carcinogens, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and mold spores. With Vivid Living we address this in our renovations and create homes that are not only good for the environment but also good for the people who live in them.”

Indoor air pollution is closely linked to allergies, asthma, respiratory infections and lung cancer. “You only have very limited control over outdoor air pollution but you have full control over what you put into your home,” says Voss. “By employing third-party-certified green building materials during construction or

renovation, you practice source control, which is the first step towards achieving a healthier indoor living environment.”

Established in 2009, Liquid Interiors is a commercial interior design studio based in Hong Kong and China. Their spaces aim to be environmentally positive and also to improve health. Rowena Gonzales, founder and creative director at the firm, suggests that anyone thinking of employing a designer or decorator looks for someone with the right credentials.

Seek out contractors accredited by LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), an internationally recognised environmental programme, which verifies that a building was designed and built to improve energy savings, water efficiency and indoor environmental quality as well as reduce CO2 emissions. BEAM Plus provides similar accreditation and peace of mind.

If using green building materials is almost a given, then the missing piece in the sustainable design puzzle is reconnecting ourselves with nature and our own environment. The emphasis now is as much on how your home can make you feel as to how little impact it can have on the environment.

The latest design concepts now include proven health benefits. At Vivid Living, this includes air and water filtration systems, sound insulation and black out blinds. Liquid Interiors has created wellness-themed hotel rooms with Vitamin C-infused showers, energising lights, dawn simulations and healthy menu options. Could this be the future for our own homes?



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Tree couples a Husky table with Ova chairs and an Infinity bench

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(Clockwise from top) Eco-friendly bedroom showcase from Vivid Living; Sniff's pure soy candles available in Tree; nature-inspired bathroom designed by Vivid Living

BIG CHANGES

If you're not planning a full makeover but would like to make some changes that can make a difference, then there is a lot of choice out there now.

Making an eco choice could be as simple as using the right paint on your walls (look for organic and non-toxic), changing the lights and lighting installed to a more earth-friendly option such as LED or replacing your shower head with a water-saving one.

Another area worth focusing your attention on is what wood to choose for your home. For flooring, look out for bamboo as a sustainable and therefore environmentally sound choice of material. You might not have heard of Kebony yet, but it's a revolutionary technology that uses a by-product from farmed sugar cane production to change soft woods into durable ones. This creates materials that have all the practicality and characteristics of critically depleted

hardwoods—and none of the toxins associated with treated wood. It's just been recognised by the Global Cleantech 100 awards for the fourth time.

Whether the wood is in your furniture or other fittings, look for Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards. This is an international non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting responsible forestry. The FSC certifies forests all over the world to ensure they meet the highest environmental and social standards. The FSC logo on a wood or wood-based product is your assurance that it is made with, or contains, wood that comes from FSC certified forests or from post-consumer waste.

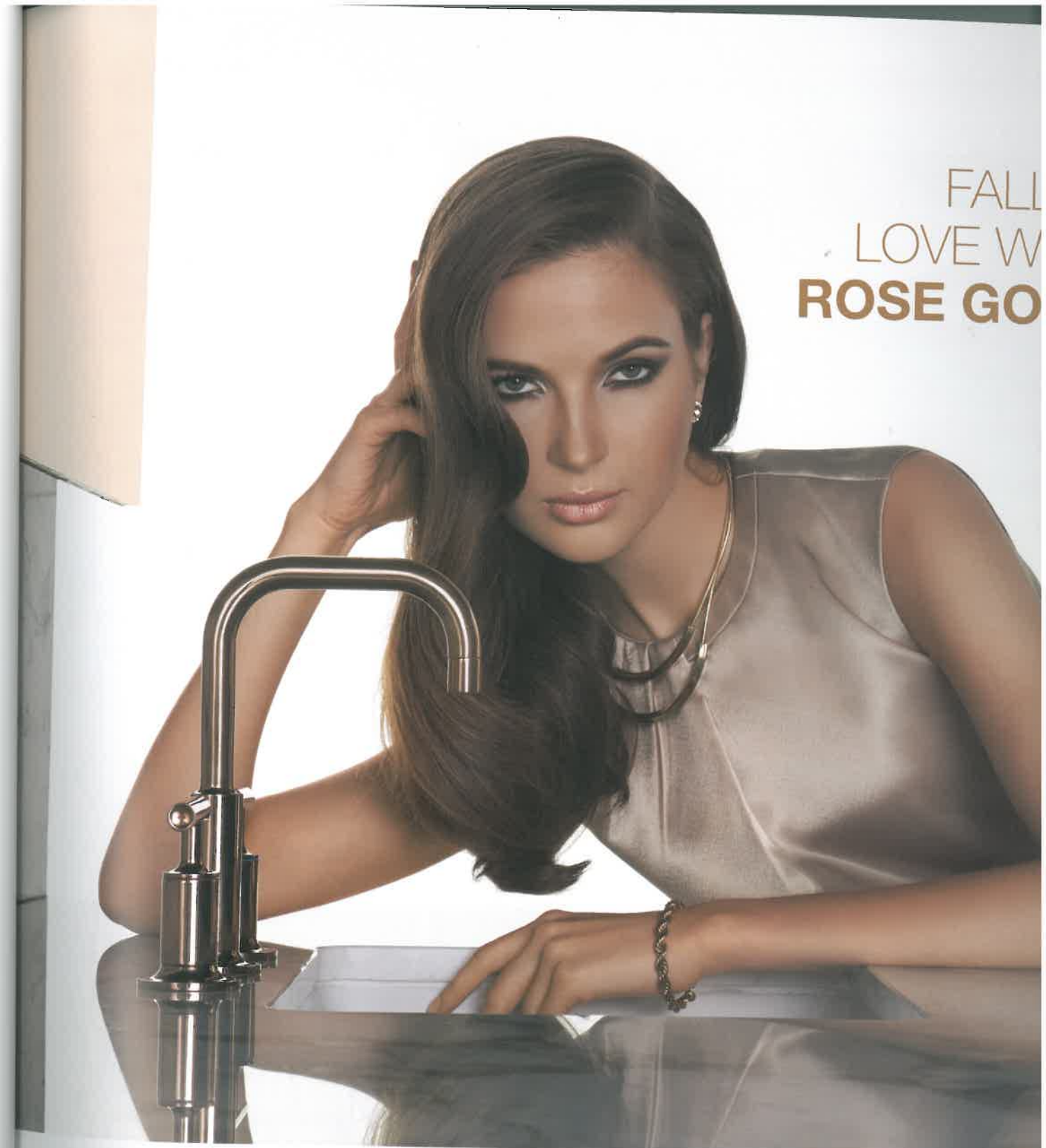
Also, most households could benefit financially from installing solar panels. Creating your own energy not only reduces your power bills, but after a few years, you could have paid off the cost of installation. What's more, using renewable energy instead of fossil fuels could cut your carbon dioxide output by up to a tonne a year. A very simple way of making a difference both to you and the planet is by installing a solar hot water heater. Solar energy is abundant in Hong Kong's sunny climate, and it is easy to use. Consider replacing your existing water heater with a new solar hot water heating system located on the rooftop of your building. Licensed contractors are available to make sure that this work is done properly, and within the law.

Being green doesn't stop after you've chosen your interior design finishes. Make sure you think about where what you throw out is going. According to Henning Voss, Hong Kong is running out of reclamation sites and landfill spaces. Construction waste accounts for about 25 per cent of the total waste intake of our landfills.

"I think that not only the government but also developers, interior designers and contractors should do their part in driving sustainability and green buildings," he says. "The costs for many green building materials are still higher than the traditional, non-sustainable ones but if developers would choose sustainable building materials then costs would go down and we would reduce the negative environmental impact."

Rowena Gonzales echoes this hope. "I hope that the Hong Kong government makes it mandatory for contractors to recycle demolition waste and divert waste from going into our overflowing landfills. This would solve a lot of current waste problems in Hong Kong."

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SMALLER STEPS

Looking for eco-friendly furniture? “Happily, it is becoming easier and easier to make mindful purchasing decisions that also deliver in the style stakes,” says Kate Babington, managing director of eco-chic store, Tree. “Reclaimed, recycled and re-loved pieces, which are often one-of-a-kind, give the home a truly unique design feel.

“People can feel good about their purchase, but they also fall in love with the distinct character of each individual piece. There is something pretty magical about a beautiful table that has a past life as a railway sleeper, or a fishing boat. Wood also improves with age, making it an incredibly long lasting and sustainable choice that reduces waste.”

It’s also worth shopping for organic, chemical-free linens and cushions, which are independently certified so that you can be assured you are getting the real deal. Tree supports Tu Textiles, a collective of Beijing-based artisans who make stunning cushions that are lovingly made from GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) certified organic cotton fabric and printed with water safe inks.

Babington points out, “You will also find companies that you love—because they prioritise sustainability—will often open doors to other eco trends and providers. Tree handpicks products from like-minded companies. We stock Sniff candles, which are eco-friendly, hand-poured, pure soy wax candles that come from a renewable and sustainable source and are 100 per cent natural.”

Apart from the health benefits—for us and the planet—of living in a sustainable home, it is worth thinking of the benefits for future generations.

“I think there is also the example that we are setting for our children and grandchildren,” says Voss. “Living in an eco-friendly home is leading by example.”

Rowena Gonzales goes one step further. “My dream is that buildings become entities that start cleaning up the environment,” she says “and reverse the effects we have done to the planet thus far.” That’s got to be something worth aiming for.



TEN STEPS TO TAKE NOW

Small changes can make a big difference

1. Plant an indoor herb garden so you have access to fresh food in your home. There are many easy, low maintenance systems such as window farms and simple flat beds.
2. Use low-flow showers and taps and collect water from your dehumidifiers, or from rain, to water your plants.
3. Encourage home exercise by integrating stand up work stations and include home exercise equipment as a part of your design.
4. Encourage healthy eating and food preparation by integrating steamer ovens instead of microwaves and include a space for juicing or blending in your kitchen design.
5. Optimise the quality of your air and water by using water and air purifiers. Vivid Living published a free white paper on its website about the most effective systems available in Hong Kong (vividliving.com.hk).
6. Recycle as much as you can. Take a look at hkrecycles.com for help.
7. If you are thinking about renovating, use only third party-certified green or organic products and avoid any products with VOCs or formaldehyde (especially for paint, flooring and cabinetry).
8. Turn your bedroom into a sanctuary. Apply sound insulation if necessary, install black out blinds, buy an organic mattress and use hypo-allergic bedding.
9. Buy locally—whether it is for your building materials, appliances or food.
10. Use green cleaning products.



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