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one

Has your renovation or build design become a little "fat"? You know this has happened when you have blown the budget and you are having to forgo sustainable materials and technologies to bring costs down. Rather than ditching the elements that will make your home comfortable and efficient long term, try to prioritise quality over quantity by reducing the size of your build. To start, ask yourself these questions: Is each space in your home multi-use and adaptable to perform at least three functions? Can wasted circulation space be used for storage, play or study? Is there dead space in the middle of utility rooms? Can you harness vertical space for sleeping or storage? And finally – if every member of your family was in a different room at one time how many rooms would still be empty? Above all, remember you will need to heat, cool and clean and maintain every square metre you build.

two

End of year socialising often results in fridges full of leftovers. Rather than using plastic wrap to keep it all fresh, consider making your own reusable waxed cloths, using fine cotton fabric with a tight weave (think sheets). To make them cut the cloth into different sized squares with pinking shears. Lay the fabric on an ironable surface on top of oven paper and cover the surface with small chunks of natural beeswax. Put another layer of paper on top and carefully hot-iron until the beeswax melts and coats the entire surface of the cloth. Roll the fabric to store it, and soften by warming between your hands to use. You can use the cloths to cover bowls and plates of left-over food, or to wrap cheeses, sandwiches and loaves of bread. Wash them between use with cold water and castile soap, and simply add more wax when it wears thin.

three

Creating dynamic workspaces that encourage diverse types of movement is necessary for productivity and health in an increasingly sedentary workforce. Designing different table levels and organising work areas so that you need to move to perform different tasks can reduce posture-related pain symptoms and increase productivity. Low tables that allow you to do some work sitting on the floor help strengthen the lower back and open the hip flexors. Having your feet elevated at the same height as the hips improves your circulation. Firm cushions can be used to raise the hips if you are not flexible enough to sit on the floor. My ideal workspace would not only have a floor-level as well as a standing work-desk, but also a daybed for post-lunch power naps and a green outdoor space for quiet sun sitting and invigorating walks.

four

Indoor plants can suffer neglect over the holiday period. To keep your pot plants watered and fresh when away for short periods you can make a wicking system. Do this by placing a vessel of water next to the plant, with a shoelace that runs from the water to the soil of the plant. The water will wick across slowly and constantly until gone. Another method is to place plants in the bath or laundry tub on top of towels sitting in water, enough so that the base of the plants is not under water. Moving the plants temporarily into a cooler part of the house and out of direct sunlight will reduce the amount of water they need.

five

Looking for the ultimate high tech toy for energy efficiency nerds? The flir one thermal imaging camera is a clever little device that attaches to an iPhone, enabling it to take thermal images (images of heat). Thermal imaging can be used to check for leaking heat in a building, such as around windows and doors in building gaps and where insulation is missing or poorly installed. It can also be used to expose dampness and electrical faults within a building's structure. The potential uses when purchasing, renovating or retrofitting a home are great. The biggest drawback lies in the fact that the camera is tied to a particular iPhone model, making it yet another gadget that will become obsolete with each upgrade. Let's hope this has been resolved by the time it is available for purchase in Australia.

flir.com

