

cover story

Friends of the earth

Local v imported. Synthetic v natural ... the city's design cognoscenti find products that tick the green box. By Anne Susskind.

For designer Michael Alvisse, the first thing that comes to mind when asked to consider green design is trawling St Vincent de Paul for beautiful objects – in effect, recycling. Michelle Maras, of carpet dealers Whitecliffe Imports, nominates a popular wool rug, until she discovers that the rug has used chemical dyes and has latex backing.

Evaluating objects that are sustainable is complex because of what is known as the cradle-to-grave effect – the idea that everything that goes into the lifespan of a product has an impact on the environment, from the energy used in its production to how long it takes to decompose. There are hidden considerations.

A chair is built on sustainable principles in Denmark, but because it has been air-freighted to Australia the cost in fuel is high.

There are other issues, not least of which is that architects, the kingpins of the design industry, struggle to come up with sustainable pieces they think are sufficiently aesthetically appealing to merit their imprimatur. Many goods purport to be green but whether they are beautiful is another question.

Tim Laurence, associate dean at the



Good living ... clockwise from above, the Elliot Chair; the Sign Stool; the LED embedded fabric, Lulu; and solar cells on Glenn Murcutt's Kangaloon.



Photo: Anthony Browell



LIGHT EMITTING DIODES (LEDs)

Glen Haron, managing director, Light Matters

"Lulu is made of an LED-embedded fabric, designed by Lume. Most people are familiar with LEDs – they are used for indicators on the phones and we see the technology in the tail lights of cars. In a lampshade, the light is in the middle and the shade around that softens the light."

LEDs are so small that they can be put in a weave, embedded in a wall. It is very energy efficient. LED need low wattage and a solar-powered LED is practically self-sustaining. The LEDs in Lulu work well as a point source; this means they can create good shadows to create accent, texture and reveal objects or surfaces in interesting ways." *Inquiries, Lighting Group, 9882 6000*

CANVAS BLINDS

Tim Laurence, faculty of design, architecture and building, UTS

"The canvas blind outside my house is on ropes, cables and pulleys, and the only energy it uses is its own. It's a very rich cream colour and covers the whole front of the upstairs balcony and works well with the exterior dark-brown painted stucco. On a sunny afternoon, you can lie in the bedroom and the heat is cut. And it allows a lovely dappled light through the balcony laceworks balustrade. It is really easy to maintain. When it decays, it literally does decay. It's not as if it takes many years to decompose; canvas is a natural material made from flax, a natural fibre." *Inquiries, Colourful Canvas, 9519 2422*

THE ELLIOT CHAIR BY SCHAMBURG + ALVISSE

Brooke Aitken, interior designer-architect

"Schamburg + Alvisse has always been highly environmentally aware. [The company] is into important certification and forestry protection, such as WWF's forest conservation initiative. The Elliot uses a European beech, which comes over by ship, not plane. It comes as a veneer and its manufacturers laminate it together to become a strong plywood. Schamburg + Alvisse uses long-

University of Technology, Sydney's faculty of design, architecture and building, says there is a further paradox; designers and architects are agents of consumption and want to create something new. Clients also crave the new. Still, it seems, there's enough out there that's both good looking and feelgood, as Domain Home discovered in its survey of architects, designers and retailers.

THE SIGN STOOL BY TRENT JANSEN

Caroline Casey, furniture designer

"It's a stackable chair made from recycled Roads and Traffic Authority signs. This is clever, intelligent and sophisticated design, yet very playful and fresh. There's so much beauty in it; it takes me back to an industrialised Rosalie Gascoigne. It's stackable vertically and horizontally. It's magical to get close to something like that, that's familiar in materials, but the form is unfamiliar. It's quite child-like but with a very sophisticated manufacturing technology." *Stockists, Chee Soon & Fitzgerald, 9360 1031*

SLIMLINE WATER TANK

Steve Kennedy, architect

"This one is from Queensland. It's quite tall, quite slender and fits neatly into the back of a garden; a really elegant shape. It holds 3000 litres. In the past year, the range of water tanks available has grown phenomenally. You can put them under decks, but my favourite is still an above-ground Zinalume or galvanised-steel tank that looks like a tank. It has references to Australian history so we feel like it's something we know." *Inquiries, Roofrite Building Products, 1800 804 901*

ADD A LITTLE **LUXURY** TO YOUR **RENOVATION**

SPEND \$150 ON DORF OR CLARK PRODUCTS AND RECEIVE A LUXURIOUS FREE BEAUTY TREATMENT

PLUS A CHANCE TO WIN AN EXOTIC ESCAPE TO A LUXURY SPA IN MALAYSIA

FOR A LIST OF PARTICIPATING RETAILERS & MORE DETAILS, VISIT WWW.DORF.COM.AU OR WWW.CLARK.COM.AU OR CALL 13 14 16

THE LEADERS IN TAPWARE

lasting stainless steel instead of chrome (which involves a lot of heavy metals in its processing). It reminds me of an Eames chair, it's quite spider-like, or ant-like, in its aesthetic. It is a new take on that look, which is wide, and there's a soft upholstered version."

Inquiries, Schamburg + Alvisse Design, 9212 7644

HEMP CUSHIONS

Virginia Kerridge, architect

"Hemp is one of the most environmentally sensible textiles available. No pesticides and fertilisers are needed to grow the crop. It's rapidly renewable with a beautiful organic feel, and has thermal and absorbent qualities. The plant's fibre is as long as the plant itself, which gives it up to eight times the tensile strength and four times the durability of cotton. Hemp is the base fabric for the cushions from Cloth. It has a roughness to it, it looks like linen, while cotton looks more manufactured."

Inquiries, 9326 7755, www.clothfabric.com

CRUCIFIX ORCHID

Neil Durbach, architect

"What could answer your brief more perfectly than a plant? The crucifix orchid is unbeatable - delicate and beautiful, an improbable thing, which flowers all year. You can torture, neglect or spoil them and they still thrive. I like that in a plant. It appears to me they need tonnes of water, or nothing at all. I haven't figured it out yet after five years of having one. It's a great gift; you can leave it in the back of the car for weeks on end and it manages. It grows in a pot and you can put in a vase and it seems to be happy. I guess you could say it's not really a designed object, unless you believe in God, of course. But it's doing good things for the environment."

Inquiries, www.calyx.com.au/epidendrum.html

PRINCE STREET CARPETS

Michelle Maras, design consultant, Whitecliff Imports

"The chairman of Prince Street is mad on being green and the US factory uses solar power, even though it makes nylon carpets. The factory also has one of the largest privately owned solar arrays. The carpet can be recycled and used for backing, and Prince Street has managed to reduce landfill waste



by more than 80 per cent since 1995. Even though there's a pattern, it's one colour and the pattern is achieved by texture. The collection has a dense pile and a softer look than usually associated with nylon."

ECOSMART FIRE

Tim Bird, industrial designer

"An open fireplace uses lots of timber and much of the heat goes straight up the chimney, and it's fixed in one location. These fires are portable and can be wheeled about, or they can be wall-mounted or fitted into a range of modules. They use methylated spirits as fuel, made from ethanol. Ethanol emissions are clean - heat steam and carbon dioxide - and don't



produce the toxic gases that fossil fuels do. It doesn't crackle, but it's still an open flame."

Inquiries, 9997 3050, www.ecosmartfire.com

SOLAR CELLS

Neil Burley, director, Anibou

"I've always found solar cells beautiful. At one extreme you see those fabulous images from space where enormous, frail-looking structures power space stations. At the other end, there are those tiny windows on calculators that provide all the power. Now solar cells power communication stations, yachts, hot-water systems and lighting. A house at Kangaloon designed by Glenn Murcutt has such an array of solar collectors that it's a net exporter of power. The cells have been simply, but beautifully, integrated into the design of the roof."

Inquiries, BP Solar, 8762 5777, www.bp.com.au/products/solar/solar.asp

PROFILO BLOC TAPWARE

Angus Parker, general manager, Rogerseller

"Tapware with a ceramic disc gives you better control over water flow. With the old technology, water gushes out. With the disc, you don't have to use a lot of pressure, or turn the tap on that hard, so you use less water, and it's less likely to drip. The discs are much longer wearing than jumper valves, too. The Profilo Bloc tapware, which won an Australian Design Mark award in 2004, has those features. Its look is minimalist and contemporary and it also has an oval outlet."

Inquiries, 9332 4800

Clean living ... clockwise from above, the Ecosmart fire; Prince Street carpets; slimline water tanks; hemp cushions; the crucifix orchid; Profilo Bloc taps; and canvas blinds.

THE ULTIMATE ALL WEATHER SOLUTION



FULLY RETRACTABLE AND FIXED AWNINGS FOR SUMMER AND WINTER PROTECTION

LATEST TECHNOLOGY

Custom built awnings to your specifications with a large range of powder coating and fabric colours to choose from. Remote control or manual operation. We specialise in difficult and custom installations.

1300 138 230

www.quantumawnings.com.au

