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# A Balanced Approach

More and more frequently, clients are requesting of their interior designer that they incorporate an environmentally-friendly element to their project. Does this impact on the choice of materials – and the budget? We ask Gordon Byrne, Creative Designer at The Interiors Group, Clare Pascoe, Director of Pascoe Interiors, and Hugh Jamieson of At Home Interiors about some of their recent eco-conscious projects.

## What 'eco' projects have you worked on recently?

**Gordon:** 'Eco' design features in many of our projects and most suppliers that we use take the issue very seriously. We have used 'eco' products on flooring and wall treatments but we have also recently taken the literal approach of putting greenery into our projects! For a current project we have placed trees in bespoke workstations for maximum design effect.

**Clare:** We don't use the Eco tag, but more we apply our self-imposed sustainable design policy to all our projects; the key points of which are: to source responsibly, re-use and re-work existing pieces into schemes where we can avoid needless waste and to ease pressure on landfill; and we champion the Best of British to support and preserve key British skills.

Some clients fully subscribe to our beliefs, and even take decisions one step further ▼



Clare Pascoe





In this project Clare used mid-century bunkbeds

▲ to include products that not only claim to be eco but after detailed research are confirmed to be genuinely eco products. In an existing project we are designing the interior for a Grade II listed home in the Cotswolds for a Finnish/American family.

The house has original lime plaster walls that we have exposed from under layers of wall paper, to lime wash with paint that is formaldehyde and oil free to ensure that the house can breathe freely to further preserve the lime plaster.

We also used stunning 100% wool fabrics on the window blinds as wool controls and balances moisture reducing damp and mould, while being the perfect way to insulate old windows. Only 100% wool would do for this function, as blended wool would lose the key properties we were after.

**Hugh:** My own home in Sheringham, Norfolk, which is a single storey house with new extensions and sedum roofs. The first thing I did was install solar panels on the roof which have already produced an income for the excess energy they produce which is fed back into the national grid.

It was a complete refurbishment back to the brick and ground which allowed me to install under floor heating, eco-friendly because the water is so much cooler than in conventional radiators, therefore saving gas or oil. I have also buried a 2000 litre water tank under my wild flower meadow, which collects rain water.

**Did having to source environmentally-friendly materials and products affect your choices of furnishings/fittings/finishes?**





Using vintage is the ideal way for Clare to recycle!

▲ **Clare:** Sourcing purely eco products does limit your choices if colour and price are your clients' key concerns, as there are limited suppliers who strive to deliver genuinely sustainable products.

However, by choosing to stick to your clients' guns on eco principals, different aspects of

choice are introduced, which introduce new aspects of choice to replace those you are limiting.

Reducing choice is never a bad thing, as sometimes clients can be intimidated by the vast array of options to choose from, so identifying the key points of a clients' criteria

to narrow choice is something all designers do – whether the key points are colour, cost or sustainability is largely irrelevant.

Eco and sustainability is also about balance, it's not always the ingredients and manufacturing processes that determine if a decision is sustainable. How a product ▼



Gordon Byrne

### Just Eat asked the Interiors Group to create a 'fun area'

▲ will last, and whether it can adapt or blend to meet the home owners growing and future needs also plays a key part in this decision.

This is why we replace 'eco' with 'sustainable' as it has wider reaching benefits than purely 'eco', which like 'fair trade' can be misused simply to make a product seem more desirable.

At Pascoe Interiors, we have an extensive library of eco and sustainable products that I have amassed through years of personal and professional interest and research, the result of which is that our clients can have a full range of choices that all subscribe to

our sustainable design policy, without feeling that their choices are in any way restricted.

Our job of researching 'eco' products gets ever easier, due to the huge improvement in technological advances that allow a wider choice of sustainable products, encouraged through government initiatives to support business, to produce products using more ecologically aware processes.

**Hugh:** Yes, for my decking I am using recycled materials (Timcowood.com), mostly plastics and wood. As it is north-facing the extra durability, compared to all-wood, appealed hugely, apart from the ethical re-use of plastics and wood waste. ▼



This image is a representation of the proposed environment and may illustrate details and materials that are not accessible by the budget provided.

## Gordon's designs for Just Eat's breakout room

▲ For internal lighting, where appropriate, I have opted for LED down lights in the ceilings (rather than low voltage or mains voltage dichroics). Outdoors LED wall lights burn all of 3 watts each and that's with light cast up and down the wall!

**Gordon:** We spend lots of time sourcing materials and products. Our materials library is always up to date with the latest finishes so we will always have what we need for projects. We have a dedicated section for specific 'eco' or green items. We have noticed particularly in flooring that most companies are committed to providing fully recycled products with the highest possible green credentials.

### Do you think there is a growing market in eco-conscious interior design?

**Gordon:** Without doubt it is not only a trend in the market but rather a 'grass root' (excuse the pun) fundamental shift across the board with almost all suppliers to deliver sustainable 'eco' products which are products of a truly green production process and company culture.

**Hugh:** Yes in this age of throw-away society there is definitely a growing market in upcycling furniture. For the whacky eclectic look the latter has lots of appeal.

LEDs make sense financially and ethically.

I find more and more clients are asking me for ideas and suggestions on how a new interior (or exterior) can incorporate sustainable or ecological aspects.

**Clare:** Our experience is that clients are more sustainably aware, but this may be because we openly invite and attract such clients. The recession has suppressed society's endemic acceptance and praise of greed. However, there are still many clients who are 'recession proof' so may care more about aesthetics and cost than the sustainability of the project, who have different feelings about waste and sustainability.



▲ New build projects now have to meet certain criteria to make sure a house is more sustainable in terms of insulation, energy consumption and waste etc., which are all steps in the right direction, but they can be seen as yet more red tape so take on a negative connotation. We need to change the way our client's view such rules so that they aren't seen as restrictive, but as forward thinking.

In Finland, homes are built with triple glazing and such advanced insulation ensure that during the winter their homes are far more efficient to heat than ours are, even though our external conditions are far milder than the grips of winter in the Nordic regions. British designers, Architects and home builders could learn an awful lot from Scandinavia!

We are proud to say, that Britain does lead the way in producing some stunning 'eco' products. We should all delve into, and support, our wonderful wool industries -from carpets, to fabrics, to insulation and apparel; and then we have a wide choice of eco paints though this is a muddier area, as some are 100% natural and additive free so 'eco' in terms of the fact they do not harm the environment as a waste product, their production can be very aggressive to the localised environment.

Designers are in a great position to lead this charge. I am very proud that it forms the basis of our core beliefs at Pascoe Interiors.

**Did any particular supplier/designer/manufacturer stand out to you as a leader in this field?**

**Hugh:** With regard to upcycling I do not think there is any one particular major



Hugh's decking comprises recycled materials

source for these due to the procurement process of the original pieces being rather ad hoc. I suspect a lot of upcycling is down to fellow interior designers looking for 'objects' to work on!

I try to source as locally as I can to avoid excess transportation costs and fuel which also helps towards the greater good.

**Gordon:** We are big fans of Interface carpets who are at the forefront of this and not only make sustainable flooring but also style the products with natural references. But it is our 'tree' suppliers that we think are absolute heroes!



Hugh Jamieson