

HOME SHOWS HAD EVERYTHING GREEN, FROM TEXTILES TO GADGETS

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This season, green is the new black. At home shows everywhere, more space than ever has been devoted to environmental products and services for greening a home from the lawn to the roof. Here are some of the highlights from recent shows.

The feature exhibit at IDEX/NeoCon for design and decor professionals was the Sustainable Condo. A steady stream of visitors toured the 1,000-square-foot demonstration suite, which showcases currently available green technologies that are intended to boost residential comfort while minimizing resource consumption and impact on the planet -- all without sacrificing style. These include energy- and water-efficient appliances, all-natural recycled or recyclable textiles and high-tech solar-collecting windows with embedded photovoltaic panels.

Also on display for the first time at this show was a selection of the latest sustainable materials that will be making their way into designers' swatch books.

There are textiles made from fast-growing bamboo; floor coverings of woven water hyacinth stalks -- another rapidly renewable plant; tile veneers created from mother-of-pearl shell fragments; and wallpaper fashioned out of recycled Japanese telephone books, to name just a few.

Also, Fluid Form's Canadian-made precast stone duplicates the look of natural stone for fireplace surrounds or decorative wall cladding without the energy-intensive quarrying and transport required for the real thing (fluidform.ca).

And Historic Woods, based in Shelburne, Ont., offers what it calls antique floors, which make use of reclaimed solid wood from old barns and other buildings, engineered into tongue-and-groove planks (historicwoods.ca). The result is a durable floor of varied tones with the patina of age and history.

Another innovation is Solutia's laminated glass, which provides shading from the sun while adding architectural interest with its brilliant jewel-tone colours, metallics or patterns. As a bonus, the American manufacturer points out that it meets hurricane standards, is bulletproof and "can substantially reduce injury from direct blast shock wave effects and flying or falling glass in bomb attacks."

While those calamities may be of concern to some, such was not the case at much of the Green Street, the environmental section at the International Home Show.

Parked at one end was the trailer of the future -- a five-sleeper home 36 feet long by eight feet six inches wide with self-sustaining heating, cooling, water and waste systems. Billed as "the urban RV," the miniHome comes in a handful of customizable models, designed by Toronto's Sustain Studio (sustain.ca). There is one hitch: The miniHome is too big to be towed by the average SUV, so it's more suited as a fixed-site weekend getaway than a travelling home.

On the other hand, it does eliminate the maintenance of a lawn. And so does **AGL's artificial grass (aglgrass.com)**. Made of non-toxic, fireproof material, it's the next generation of the stuff that pro ball fields are wearing these days. With artificial grass, there is no more exhaust-spewing mowing or trimming, no more watering, no need for harsh pesticides. Plus, if the neighbours drool over such a year-round picture-perfect yard, it'll wipe up easily, and so will salt stains and pet waste.

If keeping animals off the lawn is the aim, there is the solar-powered rodent repeller, available from Toronto's S&S Electronics (sselectronics.com). It's a weatherproof garden spike of plastic and aluminum with a continuously recharged solar panel on top. Using energy from the sun, the spike emits a combination of sound and vibration inaudible to humans but apparently hellish to little raccoon and skunk ears. Also available are solar-powered security lights and shed lights -- perfect solutions for saving a little energy without making the big leap to whole-home alternative energy.

For that, there was the Green Energy Home Show, where equipment for solar electricity and space and hot water heating shared centre stage with geothermal heating and cooling systems.

And yet another way to use solar power: the Sun Baked outdoor cooker, an environmentally friendly alternative to a backyard barbecue or a camping stove (solarcooking.ca). It takes about half an hour to pre-heat in direct sunlight and comes with a lightweight non-reflective pot in which to bake, boil or roast anything from pizza to meat. The cooker is emissions-free and blackout-proof, but a rainstorm does mean heading out for a takeout meal.

Aside from how to power the home, visitors also got a look at how to decorate in a way that is both earth-friendly and stylish in a display living room by eco-design consultant Barbara Nyke of Nikka Design (nikkadesign.ca). The comfortable, contemporary room featured, among other things, certified-organic throw pillows, a vegetable-dyed rug, a salvaged-wood console table and locally made armchairs with low-toxin foam.

It's all coming soon to a home near you.