

GREEN'S NEXT GENERATION

REMEMBER THE TERM *SUSTAINABILITY*? PROPONENTS ARE OUT TO PROVE THAT THE WORD MEANS BUSINESS.

by Kevin Fritz

If you had a GPS tracking device on John Washburn, you could virtually visit the likes of Indonesia, Thailand, India and other exotic locales around the globe as he builds an inventory of furniture and accessories for his stores in Orlando and Sanford.

Nearly all of Washburn's goods are made of recycled wood. He scours the world for scraps and unfinished pieces of household furniture; then he turns them into everything from benches and cabinets to tables and chairs to complete a home's décor.

And, without realizing it, when he started Washburn Imports 12 years ago, he was entering into a business model that would take another decade to catch on universally: green.

"Handmade furniture lets us remember where we came from," Washburn says. "The organic handmade aspect is a wonderful dichotomy to modern furniture."

Fact is, the trend toward green is not all about energy efficiency and building green homes. It's also about what you put into your home to make it sustainable. According to Greenfurniture.com, that means taking no more from the environment than can be naturally replenished. Furniture that is sustainable will not play a part in pollution or deforestation.

"We use regional wood," says Washburn. "And we take dismantled and damaged items and put them back together."

Washburn is a self-proclaimed preservationist and hates to see things thrown away, destroyed or torn down just for the sake of progress. So, by visiting places across the planet, he's able to bring some of that preservation

back home and do his part in the move toward sustainability.

Different Shade of Green

Many green enthusiasts believe the word green eventually will give way to sustainability, which is really the essence of the entire green movement. To create products or buildings that are sustainable means less maintenance and the use of fewer resources to produce the same things over and over again — ultimately leading to less waste in landfills.

"Green will soon become just part of the building code or law," contends Karen Kassik, a partner with Winter Park-based designers Lucia, Kassik & Monday.

Kassik believes an obvious illustration of the shift from green to sustainability is the growing trend of aging-in-place homes, which allow people to live in their houses as they grow older without having to remodel or worry about maintenance bills. With the average lifespan rising, the concept is catching the eye of many baby boomers, whose aging parents are moving into their children's homes. According to the Johnson & Johnson Consumer Products Co., 22 percent of the U.S. population — approximately 46 million people — provide care to an adult relative or friend.

The green thing to do is create a sustainable living environment that allows everyone to age in place.

To meet the needs of the aging-in-place phenomenon, Kassik has launched a service called "Home Accessibilities" and has established the Central Florida chapter of the nonprofit Aging in Place Council. Her ideas were spawned four years ago after finding herself with a new roommate: her mom.



> // John Washburn is relying on sustainable furniture to build his import business.

Forest Stewards

Other in-home experts have embraced the sustainability mantra by the natural resource company it keeps. Maitland-based Spence and Vaughn Fine Kitchen & Bath, for instance, uses only certified wood for its new cabinets — wood that has been awarded the Environmental Stewardship Certification, which was created by the Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association to help consumers easily identify environmentally friendly products.

"Customers definitely want to do the right thing today, and they are choosing these products," says partner Darryl Vaughn.

Much of the company's cabinetry is made of Lyptus, a fast-growing renewable wood source, which is also FSC certified, meaning that the Forest Stewardship Council maintains the chain of

custody from forest to job site. Lyptus is considered a renewable hardwood because it's grown on plantations and grows to full maturity in approximately 15 years, unlike cherry and maple, which take 40 to 50 years.

Like anything else, however, words cannot fully describe sustainability. It also takes seeing, touching and feeling. As a result, Washburn is making plans to soon enable prospective customers to sample his wares in a wine bar at his Orange Avenue location, with even a little acoustic music for ambiance. The tables and chairs will reflect his exotic, sustainable furniture. "People will be able to test drive the furniture in a relaxed atmosphere," he says.

No word yet about whether green tea will be on the menu.