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Being Energy-Conscious

WHEN DESIGNING YOUR HOME

With energy prices going through the roof, one of the most beneficial things to incorporate into your building plan is an energy-conscious design. The process focuses on ways to make your home more comfortable while keeping energy consumption at a minimum.

Quality, energy-efficient windows and insulation are definitely elements that you'll want to include in your plans. What most of us may not realize is that some of the less obvious factors, such as paint color, will also play an important role in the entire energy-efficient design process. The lightness or darkness of a color directly affects the ability to absorb or reflect heat and light. Paint colors that have a lighter color value are typically a good choice so that heat will be reflected from ceilings to other items in your home that will store the heat, such as a brick fireplace or wood floors.

Rooms in your home that have a northern exposure may feel cooler because of the absence of direct sunlight. In these locations, using warm colors such as reds, oranges and yellows will make your room feel warmer and more comfortable. In rooms that have a southern exposure or have an abundance of natural light, you may want to use paint colors with cooler hues such as blue, green and violet.

When choosing fabrics for upholstery or drapery, you should consider the insulating factor of the material by determining its ability to absorb sunlight and retain heat. You will find that materials vary greatly in the amount of heat they retain. The material color, finish and texture will directly affect light and heat absorption. Dark colors and texture are two elements found in most materials that have good thermal properties. Selecting furniture that has open legs will also allow air to circulate throughout your room and is another good option for added efficiency.

Building a home can be an exciting event, especially when you're designing a custom home to meet your needs. Making your home energy-conscious may require extra effort, but a well thought out plan will allow you to reduce energy consumption without losing the quality of design.

Here some additional energy conservation tips that can be incorporated into your home:

Seal up any windows that have excessive draught. You'll be amazed with the substantial savings on your heating bills. Up to one quarter of heat loss in your home can be attributed to poorly sealed windows and doors.

Hang heavier, lined fabric on large windows during the winter months. You may even want

to consider adding a heavier lining to other window treatments in your home such as roman shades to act as an extra barrier to protect from the cold.

Place foam insulation pads behind electrical switch plates on outside walls.

Use energy-efficient light bulbs.

Hang a beautiful tapestry on a cold wall to act as insulation.

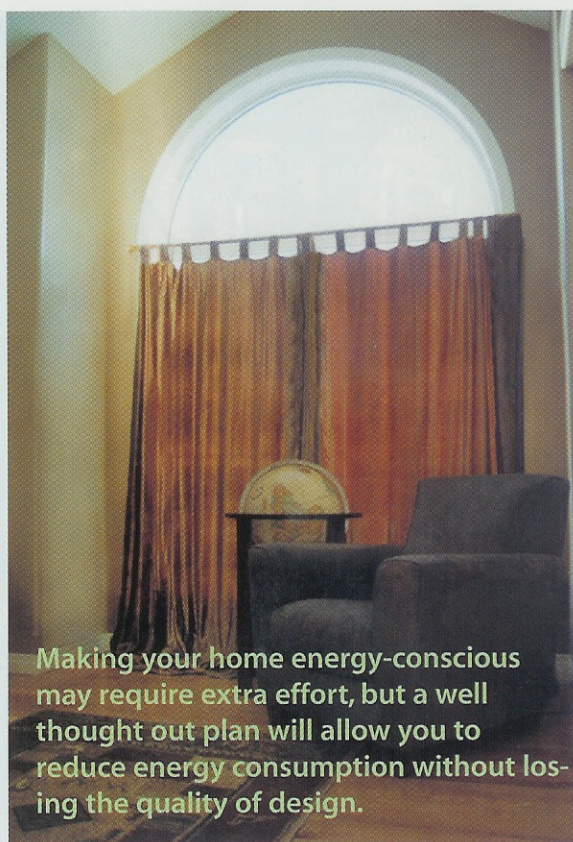
Place area rugs on hardwood or laminate floors to keep your feet warm during the winter months.

Although ceiling fans aren't voted a favorite by most designers, they will help to circulate warm air through your home, especially in an open-concept plan.

Choose wall-to-wall carpet for warmer floors. Carpet insulates better than hardwood or laminate.

Remember to keep your fireplace damper closed when it's not in use. This accounts for an alarming 14 percent of the heat loss in a home.

For more information on energy-smart design, check out the website www.seav.vic.gov.au/advice/domestic/design_features. The site contains valuable information on new home building as well as renovations. It's reading definitely worth your time and money. **R**



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