



Photograph by Elizabeth Glasgow

*Keith Baltimore of Baltimore Design Group created this comfortable family room for environmentally conscious homeowners Michelle and Michael Walrath.*



# Going Green

Eco-friendly meets *high style* in today's health- and earth-conscious interiors.

*By Mary Stipe*

**You** don't have to wear Birkenstocks to be part of the green movement these days. Environmentalists today are just as likely to wear Jimmy Choo and Armani as t-shirts and denim. And those earth-friendly products once equated with a rugged, back-to-basics lifestyle? They've moved uptown, finding a welcome home in upscale design showrooms.

Today green design can be great design, with no aesthetic compromises, according to Cheryl Terrace, founder of Manhattan-based Vital Design Ltd., who describes herself as the New York metro area's premier green designer. "I've been in interior design for a long time," she says, "and I've always been an environmentalist. I don't call what I do green design, I call what I do thoughtful design. For me, it's important to show people that you don't have to sacrifice beauty and luxury in order to be green. I do beautiful designs and I just happen to do it in a healthy manner."





Photograph by Elizabeth Glasgow

*Green design brings a new vocabulary of terms, two of which are defined here.*

#### **LEED Ratings**

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ is a nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high-performance green buildings that was developed in 2000 by the U.S. Green Building Council. Projects earn points based on six LEED categories: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, indoor environmental quality, and innovation in design. The number of points determines the LEED certification level a project receives — Certified, Silver, Gold or Platinum (the highest level). [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org).

#### **VOCs**

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are hazardous chemicals that release vapors at room temperature. “The distinctive smell of a newly remodeled home is primarily composed of offgassing toxic volatile organic compounds,” writes David Johnston in *Green Remodeling — Changing the World One Room at a Time*. Typical VOCs found in the home are formaldehyde, benzene, xylenes, toluene and ethanol. Hence the growing demand for no- or low-VOC paints, which are now offered by several manufacturers including Benjamin Moore, Sherwin Williams and Mythic Paint (one of the pioneers of non-toxic paint).

*In a corner of the Walraths’ family room a new sofa is clad in wool and built from the frame up using green materials. The side chairs are stand-ins for custom chairs that had yet to arrive. They’ll be upholstered in the same gray wool as the pillows on the sofa.*

Keith Baltimore of Baltimore Design Group in Port Washington seconds that notion. A somewhat newer convert to the environmental mindset, Baltimore is in the process of putting his money where his heart is by building and outfitting an eco-friendly design store adjacent to his current showroom. Baltimore Green is expected to open early this summer.

“It’s going to be a high-end design store,” explains Baltimore. “The only difference between this and my existing store is that almost everything will be sustainable, recyclable, eco-friendly — right down to the paper clips.” By using energy-conserving techniques and materials, such as insulation made from recycled denim, Baltimore expects the store to obtain a high LEED rating. “Because of the existing building situation I can’t make the showroom totally green,” he says, “But there are shades of green.”

Both Baltimore and Terrace agree that increased consumer demand is needed to bring the cost of green design into parity with traditional materials. Although it can often cost 10 to 25 percent more to go green, for clients who seek out eco-conscious design, the higher cost is worth it.

Health was uppermost in the mind of Michelle Walrath when





*Alchemy Glass & Light's Celestial Series of heirloom sinks turn spherical and geometric fragments of glass into one-of-a-kind works of art. "When a piece of glass broke in the studio, I decided to reclaim the fragments and experiment with them in my designs," says artist and company-owner Steve Weinstock. "What is so intriguing about the composition is that every time you look at the design you see something new." [www.alchemy-glass.com](http://www.alchemy-glass.com)*

she decided to redecorate her family room. Both Michelle and her husband, Michael, grew up in families that were conscious of the environment, but she credits Patti Wood, founder of Long Island-based Grassroots Environmental Education, with alerting her to hidden health hazards in the home. "As soon as I heard Patti speak about the VOCs in paints and that there was an alternative," says Walrath, "I jumped right in. As a person who is at home all the time with the kids, I felt our house should be the safest spot for all of us."

The Walraths began experimenting with eco-materials when they redecorated the dining room of the North Shore home they bought two years ago. But when it came to designing a family room that would function well for both children and adults, they realized they needed the help of an interior designer. Michelle Walrath had seen and liked some of Keith Baltimore's work, so she

visited his showroom, describing the project she had in mind and adding one caveat: she wanted to do the room "as purely green as possible."

When Walrath learned about Baltimore Green, she knew she had come to the right place. "The new green showroom will be a big help," she says, noting that during her recent family-room project she seldom had anything to put her hands on. "I just had to imagine that it would work. It's hard not knowing what a wood finish or a fabric is actually going to look like on the finished product," she says. "With the new storefront, people will be able to see how beautiful it really is."

The Walraths' newly renovated space has become the cozy haven they envisioned. The walls are covered in 18-inch squares of handmade rice paper. Semi-sheer draperies are done in a linen-rich horizontal stripe produced with non-toxic, heavy-metal-free dyes. The