



## Sustainable Design

By Ana Engelhorn

Interior Designer and Founder, Ana Englehorn

Ana Engelhorn was born in Switzerland, to Spanish and German parents, and travelling has always been a way of life for her. Through her travels Ana has experienced some of the world's most celebrated hotels and an array of beautiful private homes, yet the interiors that always made the biggest impression were those that had a sense of character. These characterful interiors were created through playful curiosity, not a trend, and they were designed through life experiences and personal taste, not a formulaic process. This passion for unique character and relaxed luxury has stayed with her. Ana is an Associate of the Society of British and International Design (SBID), one of the leading British professional accrediting bodies, supporting professional and trading standards of UK interior designers, architects and manufacturers. Here, Ana delves into the subject of sustainable design as a philosophy and a life altering movement, not just a passing trend.

Sustainability is echoed in my design philosophy of 'perfectly imperfect' interiors, which celebrates the imperfections found in old objects and natural building materials. Wherever possible, I try to use organic materials and restore and reuse furniture or original architectural features. I love antique pieces, which usually become more beautiful and valuable with age. I also try to use local tradespeople and craftspeople who share my ethos of high quality, sustainable products. Clients usually approach me because they share my perfectly imperfect ethos and sense of style. I have not yet had someone who wants a minimalistic, 100 per cent contemporary space – that



Above: An antique Swedish dresser in an Ana Englehorn project



would be a challenge! The fact that like-minded people come to me means we already share a desire for taking a sustainable approach, so can get on and make it happen! This often involves embracing the old. Most of my clients want to include antiques in their space, so I find out what pieces they already have and wish to reuse and then help them decide what items they would like me to source.

Furthermore, my clients, like me, tend to embrace imperfections. If a wardrobe requires a slight manoeuvre to shut properly, for example, it's seen as a quirk that makes it special rather than as an issue.

Moreover, as I learn about my clients' lifestyles, I try to incorporate interior design features that not only complement their daily living needs, but promote a more sustainable, eco-friendly life. For example, if areas for recycling bins or containers are cleverly designed into the space, they're more likely to be used. And I always try to promote the most efficient products, like well-insulated windows and energy-efficient lighting. As I learn about a client's style and design their interior, I am able to draw on my list of trusted suppliers who share this sustainable ethos and produce high-quality, long-lasting pieces that I am confident in recommending.

It's important for me to meet my clients several times before a project and develop an easy and open rapport with you. I fill out a detailed questionnaire with my clients at our initial meeting, but the questions don't stop there. I gradually learn more as I get to know better how they live.

It's much easier to take a fully sustainable approach in a new



*Above: In this project the roof tiles were taken off and reused in the new roof*

build than a remodel as you can design it with the most efficient, eco-friendly appliances and building materials. However, even with homes that are just getting a fix or redesign, in addition to reusing old objects and natural building materials, new technology can be integrated. For instance, I just discovered a paint that takes CO2 out of the air! One repeated challenge I face when trying to design sustainably

is around furniture and the time it takes to restore older pieces.

Upholstering an existing sofa, for example, takes much longer than just buying a new one.

Researching bespoke solutions for a client also takes more time. It would be much easier to go for mainstream solutions that may or may not take the environment into consideration. If it takes more time, I have to charge more for my time and that can be a difficult conversation to have.



If sustainability is truly at the heart of a design, the use of space becomes secondary, and the client has to live with the result. A sustainable approach could dramatically change what you had previously envisioned or it could be exactly what you wanted. For example, although there is paint that removes CO<sub>2</sub> from the air, you can only get that paint in very light colours at the moment. If you were committed to being as eco-friendly as possible, you might have to sacrifice your first choice of colour or make compromises, like using that paint for just the ceiling or only in some areas of the house. Every aspect of a design or build is like that – you need to think about what you would like and how sustainable you are going to go. It's about making choices.

Inspiration for sustainable, organic design can be found everywhere, that's the beauty of it. I am inspired by so many things – the places I see on my travels, places and images I come across in daily life, suppliers who have weaved sustainability into how they make their products. For instance, Hellooow in South Africa produce chandeliers out of clay beads instead of plastic and also give underprivileged women a job opportunity and the chance to be part of something bigger. Organisations like Recover upcycle furniture and work with donated or reclaimed materials – they also offer jobs to people recovering from addiction or mental illness. There are many companies using waste materials to create innovative products. For example, Ecovative Design create lamps made from agricultural waste and mushroom roots! I also try to meet up regularly with other interior designers to see what they're doing and go to

galleries to see what artists are doing. All these observations and experiences get logged in my brain and come together in my mind to inspire my own design work. I can often visualise what I want to achieve; the challenge is to then sit down and try to piece it together on the computer and bring my vision to life.

Looking outside my own studio and on a global scale, I am half German, half Spanish, but was born in Switzerland. I instinctively go to those countries for inspiration, but also feel very inspired by Italy, France and Scandinavia. Scandinavians are, for me, the best at creating sustainable yet comfortable, design-led interiors or buildings. Swiss and Germans, on the other hand, take sustainability to the top but don't temper it with softer textures and items.

I think sustainability will become increasingly important – in interior design as well as in

construction. Off-site modular building, for example, where waste is reduced and more environmentally friendly buildings are created, is becoming more popular. In interior design I would like to see more progress on textile waste. Burning unwanted textiles should be made more difficult to encourage businesses to rethink how they might recycle or sell them. We, as designers, I think, will move to using only the most efficient products where possible, especially in areas like windows and lighting. I think people in general will start taking more responsibility for the items they own. Designers can help by encouraging clients to either reuse, restore or pass on unwanted items to charities or organisations who can salvage and repurpose them.

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*Above: Featuring 18th Century Reclaimed flooring*