

Beautiful DESIGN

KITCHENS | BATHROOMS | EXPERT ADVICE | SUSTAINABLE IDEAS



PHOTOGRAPHY MARNI HAWSON

20 KITCHEN
& BATHROOM
IDEAS
page 107

20 eco-friendly KITCHEN & BATHROOM IDEAS

CHECK OUT OUR TOP TIPS TO TAKE YOUR KITCHEN AND BATHROOM RENOVATIONS IN A PLANET-FRIENDLY DIRECTION - WITHOUT THE GREENWASHING

Words JESSICA BELLEF & JANE PARBURY

An eco-friendly kitchen or bathroom is where natural materials meet recycled and repurposed elements, and where landfill waste is minimised. It's water- and energy-efficient, and filled with daylight and toxin-free air. The good news is that balancing your needs with the planet's is within reach. "Building and renovating play a huge role in the world's carbon footprint, so the more sustainable choices you're able to make when designing your kitchen or bathroom, the better," says Sacha Leigh-Murray, general manager of sales and marketing at Laminex, which has Global GreenTag certification. Here are 20 ideas to help you plan a beautiful design, sustainably.

1

Consult the professionals

A truly sustainable space is built for the long haul, so for a kitchen you'll want to use forever, seek help from a design expert. "You will be able to include elements in your kitchen design to make it more eco-friendly that you may not have considered, from clever lighting to waste solutions," explains Felicity Page, senior designer at Freedom Kitchens. "They will also ensure that your kitchen layout is the best it can be, making the most of your space and ensuring that it is both practical and stylish, so you can enjoy it for a long time to come!"

To improve the energy efficiency of this Edwardian home, Megan Norgate of Brave New Eco gave it a thermal upgrade, retrofitting insulation and installing smart double-glazed windows. >

PHOTOGRAPHY MARNIE HAWSON DESIGN BRAVE NEW ECO ARTWORK UNKNOWN ARTIST



Below: To provide passive heating and cooling in this all-electric, north-east facing kitchen, Megan used porcelain tiles on a concrete slab to harness natural thermal mass. The stylish cupboards and drawers are crafted from eco-certified blackbutt veneer and birch plywood. Opposite: In her country kitchen, interior designer Nicki Dobrzynski found a sweet cupboard on Gumtree to display her vintage copper cookware.



Invest in timeless design

Steer clear of fads and short-lived trends when planning your new kitchen. “Consider a neutral colour palette with a classic door profile such as Shaker-style or flat-panel joinery,” suggests Felicity. “While features such as handles can be updated, you don’t want to be redesigning your entire kitchen after a few years because you followed something trendy that quickly fell out of fashion.”

3 BALANCE OLD AND NEW

If you’re renovating an existing kitchen, ask yourself whether everything needs to be replaced. If your timber cabinetry is solidly built and just looks dated (hello, orange-hued pine!), you could work wonders with a sander, a lick of fresh paint and new handles. Often, too, an old kitchen can be resurrected by keeping the cabinetry carcasses intact and just replacing the doors and benchtop, reducing the amount of waste otherwise destined for the tip.

4 SHOP SECOND-HAND

Look on Gumtree, Facebook Marketplace and similar forums for everything from second-hand sinks, flooring and cabinetry to whole kitchens, complete with appliances and benchtops. Not only could you pick up a bargain, you’ll also be diverting products and materials from landfill.

5 CHOOSE ECO-CONSCIOUS CABINETRY

Natural materials like timber and plywood top the sustainable list for joinery, but not all are created equal. To be considered sustainable, timber products need to be drawn from managed forests – plus there are other factors to consider, such as how well they’ll last. “When designing an eco-conscious kitchen, some might be wedded to the idea of only using natural materials,” says Sacha. “However, high-quality laminates offer a durability that should challenge our thinking on what is a truly eco-conscious, sustainable material.”

6 SEEK OUT PLANET-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS

Beyond timber, there are plenty of materials to consider for other surfaces. For floors, cork has fantastic eco credentials and is harvested without destroying the tree. Most linoleum is biodegradable and almost entirely made from natural, sustainable resources. Fast-growing bamboo is ready to harvest within just a few years and can also be used for benchtops. And stainless steel requires resources for processing, but it’s long-lasting and can be recycled again and again.

PHOTOGRAPHY (THIS PAGE) NICKI DOBRZYNSKI (OPPOSITE) MARIE HAWSON DESIGN (OPPOSITE) BRAVE NEW ECO

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7 Think efficiency

“Energy-efficient appliances are a simple way to reduce your kitchen’s environmental footprint,” says Sacha. “Do your research when buying appliances and consider aspects such as products that use less water and less energy.” Beyond dishwashers and fridges that score highly on the government’s star energy rating – basically, the more stars the better – consider clever items like boiling water taps, such as Zip. They’re designed to maintain water temperature and deliver only the amount you need, making them much more energy efficient than a kettle.

8 Make war on waste

We throw out around 7.6 million tonnes of food a year, impacting our wallet as well as the planet. Planning your food storage carefully, so you can see at a glance what you have on hand, will help reduce waste in your household, while dedicated bins will make recycling a breeze. “Include one or two of our hidden Ninka bins with compartments for general waste as well as recycling and compost with the bioBin included,” suggests Felicity. “These don’t need to be lined with plastic bags, they can easily be washed out.” >



11
TAPPED IN

Swap your taps and showerheads to low-flow styles that minimise water consumption. When researching options, look for water-efficiency ratings, and consider the tapware's finish. "We avoid chrome tapware due to the high toxicity in the manufacturing process," says Megan Norgate, founder and design director of Brave New Eco. "We always give preference to Australian-manufactured tapware with a long-lasting finish, either solid living brass or high-quality PVD." (PVD is a durable, eco-smart alternative to powder coating).

12
WASTE NOT

If you are in bathroom renovation mode, pay attention to the existing elements you can incorporate into your new design – don't throw it all out with the proverbial bathwater! "I am big on repurposing items the client already owns to avoid adding to landfill," says Danielle Bonello-Dunsford of Danielle Victoria Design Studio. "For example, we reuse existing mirrors if they are in good condition." Megan suggests quality tapware can often be reinstated, "as can fixtures like basins, baths and toilets".

13
SURFACE MATTERS

Keep your material selections as natural as possible and avoid synthetics that emit toxins. Look for sustainably sourced materials such as bamboo and reclaimed wood. Natural stone is hardwearing and organically beautiful, while clay ceramic and recycled glass tiles are also eco-friendly options. Or, consider recycled materials made from the by-product of other manufacturing processes. "Materials and products such as vanity surfaces and some tiles that incorporate post-industrial waste can be a good option," says Megan.

Above left: Victorian ash veneer adds a local touch in this kitchen from Slap Architects by Angus McKay and Len Chapma. **Opposite:** Megan teamed recycled Bakelite door handles with a reclaimed enamel tub raised on sculptural pigs' trotter feet. Australian-made uncoated brass tapware completes the scheme.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARNIE HAWSON/ARCHITECT (THIS PAGE)
SLAP ARCHITECTS DESIGN (OPPOSITE)/BRAVE NEW ECO



14

Enduring palettes

Imagine updating our bathrooms every time a new colour design trend was announced. The thought is exhausting and completely harmful to the planet – all that waste! To create a bathroom with longevity, stick to a colour palette you truly love in a look that works for your home. If in doubt, think timeless. "We are big believers in classic bathroom designs that last and don't date quickly, and we achieve this by avoiding fads or on-trend products," shares Danielle. >

9
Shop close to home

Even the greenest of products can come with a big carbon footprint if they're shipped from afar. "Buying local not only reduces the carbon footprint of your material selection, it also provides social and economic benefits to many local communities and ensures the materials you are using are made to Australian standards," explains Sacha. It's also easier to monitor – and reward! – local firms for their commitment to sustainability, in areas such as manufacturing, packaging and energy consumption.

10
Seek out innovation

Product designers are working to create exciting new materials from recycled or readily available sources, with plenty of innovative, eco-friendly products already in the pipeline. Think paper-composite benchtops, made from a combination of paper and resin, such as Paperock or Richlite; bio-based Mogu floor tiles, which are derived from mushrooms; or Alkemi benchtops, which feature recycled acrylic and copper and aluminium flakes.

15 BRIGHT SPARK

Switching to LED bulbs is one of the easiest ways to decrease your bathroom's energy usage. "They are very efficient," says Megan of the globes, which have a longer lifespan than traditional incandescent bulbs. Automated lighting will also keep your energy costs down. "One way of doing this is using a sensor light that only comes on when the bathroom is in use," says Danielle. "I usually place these under wall-mounted vanities."

16 VINTAGE CHARM

Turn trash into treasure by repurposing salvaged materials, offcuts and cast-off furniture. Danielle loves how reclaimed timber shelving and cabinetry imbue a space with an organic feel, and Megan is a fan of transforming furniture into bespoke vanities. "We have done this with second-hand cabinets, hall console tables and credenzas in the past," she says. In a recent project in Melbourne, she included an old clawfoot bath that travelled from the country to its new city home. The vintage tub was resprayed and is now a stunning focal point in the contemporary space.

17 BREATHE EASY

For fresh air, Megan specifies low-VOC paints, tiles, glues and grouts, which are less toxic than standard varieties. "Ventilation in a bathroom is also very important to reduce mould," explains the designer. Exhaust fans, vents and windows will encourage air circulation, while natural light can reduce the air's moisture content. When space is too tight for a window, Danielle incorporates skylights and sky tubes. "A skylight that can open will also provide the much-required ventilation," she adds.



18 Maintenance matters

Invest in high-quality materials and products that are correctly installed, but ensure they are well maintained (reseal natural stone tiles, for example). This approach minimises the need to replace elements, keeping them out of landfill for longer. "Bathrooms are one of the hardest working areas of our homes and are susceptible to wear and water damage," says Megan. "They are also one of the most expensive areas to renovate, so it makes sense to invest in the best quality fixtures, fittings and surfaces you can."

19 Deep cleanse

Shop mindfully for everyday bathroom essentials and keep your surfaces sparkling with eco-friendly, toxin-free cleaning products, or alternatively go DIY. As Megan says, "White vinegar and bicarbonate of soda are the best bathroom cleaning products!" Look for Australian brands that incorporate sustainable, ethical ingredients and use recyclable, refillable packaging. And apply this thinking to your beauty and body products – when reducing your impact on the environment, the tiniest gesture counts.

20 Circle of life

If you've been planning a renovation, chances are you will have amassed a mountain of product and material samples, from a medley of tile offcuts to piles of timber veneer and tapware finishes. Instead of throwing them out when your renovation is done and dusted, give your samples a more sustainable farewell by returning them to the company that supplied them (while simultaneously ridding your beautiful new home of clutter!). Many brands are more than happy to organise return postage and can supply a pre-paid envelope with your samples when they are mailed out. 🌱

PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP LEFT & OPPOSITE) MARNIE HAWSON (TOP RIGHT) BRIGID ARNOTT ARCHITECT (TOP LEFT) SLAP ARCHITECT'S DESIGN (OPPOSITE) BRAVE NEW ECO

Above left: Natural materials shine in this ensuite by Slap Architects, featuring a handsome timber pillar, wooden GlobeWest stool and clay ceramic 'Terra' pendant from Marz Designs. **Above right:** The bathroom in this off-grid cottage boasts shutters crafted by the homeowner's dad. **Opposite:** Megan reduced material usage by tiling only halfway up the bathroom walls. The vanity and brass tapware are both locally made.



MEGAN NORGATE

Interior designer and permaculture designer Megan Norgate is the founding director of Melbourne-based studio Brave New Eco.

What does sustainability mean to you?

“Working with the existing footprint as much as possible.”

What’s one eco-friendly feature you try to include in every project?

“It’s very unsexy, but ensuring a home is well-insulated and sealed to make heating and cooling more efficient is paramount.”

How do you boost a home’s connection to nature?

“We reorientate a home, if possible, to capture light and warmth from the north. Windows should frame views of the outdoors and garden.”

Favourite place to shop for second-hand items?

“Facebook Marketplace.”

What furniture piece is on your wish-list?

“I love everything by Tide Design. Their pieces are made of beautiful materials and are timeless, striking this wonderful balance of solidity and lightness.”

Most cherished things in your home?

“I have a beautiful handstitched quilt that my grandmother, Judith, made when she was 83, and we have a stunning hand-me-down coffee table by the modernist Hungarian designer Dario Zoureff.”

What’s your dream travel destination?

“Glenorchy, New Zealand. It’s one of the most magical, extraordinary places on Earth – *The Lord of The Rings* country – and we’re lucky to be working on an off-grid cabin project there now with local architects.”

What’s exciting you right now?

“My husband and I are restoring an 1890s cottage on a small permaculture farm in South Gippsland, Vic, using predominantly recycled materials. It’s a fascinating (and slow) project.”

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Brave New Eco worked with Pledge Builders on this home in Melbourne to ensure the inclusion of as many passive house principles as is possible with a heritage-listed reno. >



PHOTOGRAPHY (MAIN IMAGE) MARNIE HAWSON (PORTRAIT) PHOEBE POWELL STYLING (MAIN IMAGE) BELLE HEMMING BUILDER PLEDGE CUSTOM BUILD BUILDING DESIGNER GREEN SOLAR DESIGNS