

SHARON HAMILTON

– *Interiors*

Co-running green design and sustainable design and construction company Your Abode (www.yourabode.com.au) with her partner who is a designer and builder, for about seven years, Sharon is our guru on the interiors side of things.



“People are becoming more aware about the environmental impact of their home, but it’s more from the resource point of view, of add-on things like rainwater tanks, photovoltaic panels, maybe even using certain glass that performs better thermally. But then, people don’t really think about the interior, and the chemicals that some products can bring into their homes.

“For instance, one of the major materials used in joinery and kitchens is MDF board which has a high proportion of formaldehyde, a known carcinogen in the World Health Organisation’s categories. Yet this is allowed as a material that you put in your home, which then permeates into your environment through the evaporation of gases as VOCs [volatile organic compounds]. Then there are things like carpets – where that new smell is chemicals releasing into your environment from the glues that are binding carpets and the backings together. It’s these sorts of things that I think consumers are not particularly aware of.

“Some people change their interiors regularly, and it’s a surprisingly resource-intensive process. It’s important to design interiors so they’re timeless. If you choose good materials, use a colour palette that is simple and reflects the inhabitant’s taste, then you’re not following fashions and therefore needing to

change it soon after. I find people are happier with the end result if they’ve considered the environment, not only in the resources they’ve used, but also how their living environment will be.

“There’s still a misconception about what people think green should look like. I think it’s getting better than it used to be – when we started Your Abode we noticed that a lot of people saw green and sustainable as something that was not fitting for an urban environment. They assumed it was something more suited to rural living, where homes could be made from mud bricks and easily oriented to the north for the sun. But, largely, we’re designing for people who live in an urban environment. There’s more awareness that green doesn’t mean you have to compromise on style, it’s more just about choosing mindfully.

“I do love timber, it’s one of my favourite materials to work with. Australian hardwoods have an amazing array of colours and tones through all the different species. I particularly like recycled timber – it gives the home warmth and character. We make a point of not using timber that hasn’t got some provenance or chain of custody. Some of the timber veneers we use have the Forestry Stewardship Certification, we also use Greenpeace Good Wood ecotimber, and we love using the character-rich recycled timbers of Australian hardwood.”