DESIGN INSPIRATION · SUSTAINABILITY

This Is What a 100 Percent Sustainable, Cruelty-Free Home Looks Like

This animal products were used in the making of this house.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARY MATCHINO

It all started with a set of orange armchairs. Designer Caroline Turner and her client Page Barber were furniture shopping at Jayson Home in Chicago when all of a sudden Barber spotted the pair of velvet swivel chairs. "I've never seen her react that way!" remembers Turner, who had previously worked with Barber and her husband on their Windy City apartment. "She had an emotional reaction to them because they reminded her of her grandmother's house." The burnt hue anchored Turner and Barber in a '70s color scheme, and from there the rest of the space fell into place.

Barber and her husband bought the home in Three Oaks, Michigan, as a fixer-upper that would serve as a retreat for their family. Transforming the dated—we're talking linoleum floors and wall-to-wall carpeting—A-frame into a light and breezy enclave was no easy feat.

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COURTESY OF CAROLINE TURNER

Specifics of a gut renovation aside, there was another stipulation that presented its own set of challenges: Everything in the home had to be 100 percent clean and animal-production-free. "It comes from personal values—wanting to minimize our footprint and create a home in a way that aligns with what we believe is healthy for the planet and for us," says Barber. "We liked the challenge of finding ways to do that without sacrificing beauty and design."

Barber's sustainability mentality is one more and more homeowners seem to be prioritizing in 2021, and designers are falling in line, too. "I think it actually makes our jobs more interesting," adds Turner. "It's all about small steps. A few changes make a much bigger impact if everyone makes them."

Here, Turner explains how anyone can mimic the tiny triumphs from this stylish space in their own home.

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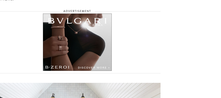
Do Your Homework

The best thing you can do for a more eco-friendly house? Research. "If I present something and the client likes it, we look up the practicals of the company together," says Turner. For example, the Sherwin-Williams paint they used throughout the space and the Sunbrella fabric assigned to the dining chairs come about after reading the sustainability blurb on each company's website.



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Pick the Right Fabrics

Concerned that blue jeans might stain the white sofa, Turner and Barber tored themselves in a store, denim in hand, rubbing the pants on various couches to see which coverings reacted best. "We couldn't use Scotchgard or protectors because of the chemicals, so I had to be very aware of how fabrics would wear naturally," says the designer.

She recommends paying particular attention to anything you might sit or lay on—basically anything your skin comes into contact with—and making sure those materials are easy to wash and toom-free.

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> "It's all about small steps: A few changes actually make a much bigger impact if everyone makes them," says Turner.

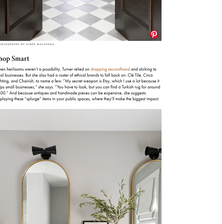
Don't Discount Hand-Me-Downs

Before you so much as step foot in a store, do a sweep of your attic—you never know what hidden treasures you'll find. "Taking what your parents purchased and renewing it to give it new life is great, because then those items don't end up in a landfill and it's cost-effective," says Turner.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARY MATCHINO

Shop Smart

When heirlooms weren't a possibility, Turner relied on shopping secondhand and sticking to local businesses. But she also had a roster of ethical brands to fall back on: Cle Tile, Circa Lighting, and Chairish, to name a few. "My secret weapon is Etsy. Which I use a lot because it helps small businesses," she says. "You have to look, but you can find a fabulous rug for around $100 that looks like something that would cost thousands of dollars." Another trick she's digging? Replace "splurge" items in your public spaces, where they'll make the biggest impact.



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Be Ready to Compromise

According to Turner, the hardest part of being 100 percent clean was marrying what she had in mind from a design (and price) perspective with the requirements of green living. For example, the Sherwin-Williams paint they used "is a little more expensive than a really good price, but they were made in China," she remembers. "We ended up spending three times the amount, but we found them at an American company in a similar fabric that was woven, so it didn't need to be treated and it looked beautiful."

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Take It Slow

Okay, so this advice might not be practical for the functional things you need on a daily basis (i.e., a bed), but for any decorative touches and investment pieces, it's often worth it to wait. "Don't buy something just to fill a space!" cautions Turner. Every single thing in this home is there because the couple fell in love with it—if it was just "fine," it wasn't good enough. "That means that they're going to want to keep those pieces forever and hopefully pass them down in their families," she continues. It's a lesson that really shines in this project. After all, no one ever feels just so-so about their longer armchairs.

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