

# Eco-friendly and posh

## Designer: Sustainability, luxury not mutually exclusive

By Radish staff

**D**reamHome — a collaboration between nine of Chicago's top interior design firms now on display at the Merchandise Mart Design Center — includes among its luxury-appointed rooms an eco-friendly kitchen. Drawing from her unique style and design inspirations, designer Jessica Lagrange has translated sustainable products into kitchen comfort and luxury. Radish caught up with Lagrange for the following Q&A.

**Radish:** As an interior designer, what has the emergence of green design meant to you and/or your profession?

**Jessica Lagrange:** It allows us to be creative as well as environmentally responsible in our selections and designs. A combination of the two is always the ideal.

**R:** What's green about the kitchen you've designed for the 2007 Dream Home?

**JL:** Many of the items have green attributes, as well as elements of the design in general. For example, we reused the existing stone floor. It is lovely, so we designed around it instead of creating waste. The door (if it did, in fact, lead to the outdoors) offers natural light, hopefully decreasing use of electricity. In terms of the products, the cabinetry features sustainable, responsibly harvested woods with nontoxic finishes, accented by tagua nut, a renewable product whose harvesting creates jobs for its local economies.

**R:** Does it cost more to design, create and outfit an environmentally responsible kitchen?

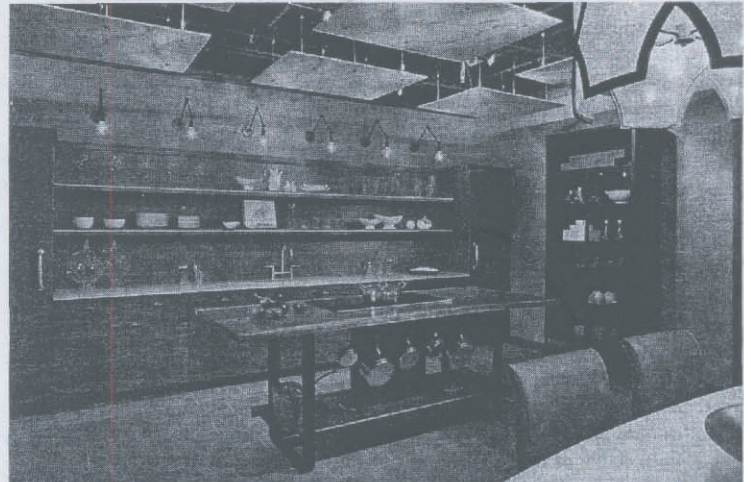
**JL:** Perhaps initially, as it takes a bit more time to source some of these items, which I hope will continue to change. The items may also need to be custom, which often adds to the expense and/or lead time. Efficient appliances, lamps, etc., may be a bit more expensive at the outset, but the whole idea behind them, and behind sustainable design in general, is that in the long run they will reduce resources used. For example, an Energy Star-rated stove may be more expensive than its inefficient counterpart, but it will use less electricity and save money on the utility bills.

**R:** For those who tour the DreamHome kitchen, what kinds of differences — if any — will they note between a traditional kitchen and this one?

**JL:** I hope that they won't notice any sacrifices, as none were made. We, and our vendors, have worked very hard to ensure that everything is of the highest quality. I can honestly say that I would use every item again in an instant, even if my goal was not sustainability. If people notice anything, I hope they will notice the beauty of the natural materials.

**R:** Is it hard to find or work with environmentally-friendly materials and products?

**JL:** Certainly more difficult than finding items not considered environmentally-friendly, but, again, that is changing every day. Many people may find that they need sources willing to build custom items. For example, a sofa may be offered in three widths, but its "green" counterpart may be offered in one width, which won't work. Again, this is changing, and I expect that soon that sofa will be "green" in all three widths, and therefore able to accommodate more spaces.



Jessica Lagrange's eco-friendly DreamHome kitchen. (Photo by Nathan Kirkman)

**R:** Are you seeing more clients who want to use green materials in their homes?

**JL:** Yes, I have; I attribute it to the public's increased awareness of what sustainable design is and how it helps the environment.

**R:** Aside from the DreamHome, what does the Merchandise Mart Design Center offer for the environmentally concerned homeowner?

**JL:** Most of our sources are from the Mart ... the cabinetry is by el: Environmental Language (known also for their lovely furniture). Several showrooms feature antiques — Mike Bell and Richard Norton are two — which offer the best and easiest way to be environmentally friendly.

**R:** What advice do you have for homeowners who are planning to hire an interior designer to help them "go green?"

**JL:** I would offer the same advice to them as to anyone else: be clear about what your goals are. Offer favorite images from magazines so that the designer can learn your aesthetic. Be clear and honest about your budget so that the designer knows whether to show you a \$4,000 area rug or a \$50,000 antique Tabriz. And, most importantly, hire a designer you trust and connect with. Your designer will, hopefully, offer advice about "going green," so if they tell you that more or less money should be spent in a certain area to attain that goal, you need to believe they are telling you the truth.



See Jessica Lagrange's green kitchen at DreamHome, open weekdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. through Dec. 21 at the Merchandise Mart Design Center, Chicago. For more information, visit [www.merchandisemartdesigncenter.com](http://www.merchandisemartdesigncenter.com) or call (800) 677-6278. For more about Jessica Lagrange Interiors, visit [www.lagrangemann.com](http://www.lagrangemann.com).