

2010 no. **28**

The Sustainability Issue + Design for a Living World + Green Depot + Portland Transit + Design for Good

Signs
Environments
Graphics
Designssegd**DESIGN**design for
a living world

As one of the world's leading conservation organizations, The Nature Conservancy developed Design for a Living World to raise awareness of sustainable sourcing. Ten prominent designers used sustainably grown and harvested materials to create beautiful and fragile pieces. Each of these landscapes provides crucial livelihoods to local communities and is threatened by climate change, deforestation, overdevelopment, and other human activities.

Design for a Living World illuminates the importance of their source, including the people and cultures that have been selected for their experimental outlook on the issues of sustainability and social justice. In sketches, models, and finished objects, the designers, led by award-winning photojournalist Ami Vital, document the many landscapes explored in the exhibition.

Designers hold a crucial position in the consumer, from concept to store shelf. They make choices and can help steer manufacturers and consumers toward environmentally sustainable practices. By focusing on the objects we cherish inanimate objects, we must do this and strike a better balance between consumption and sustainability.

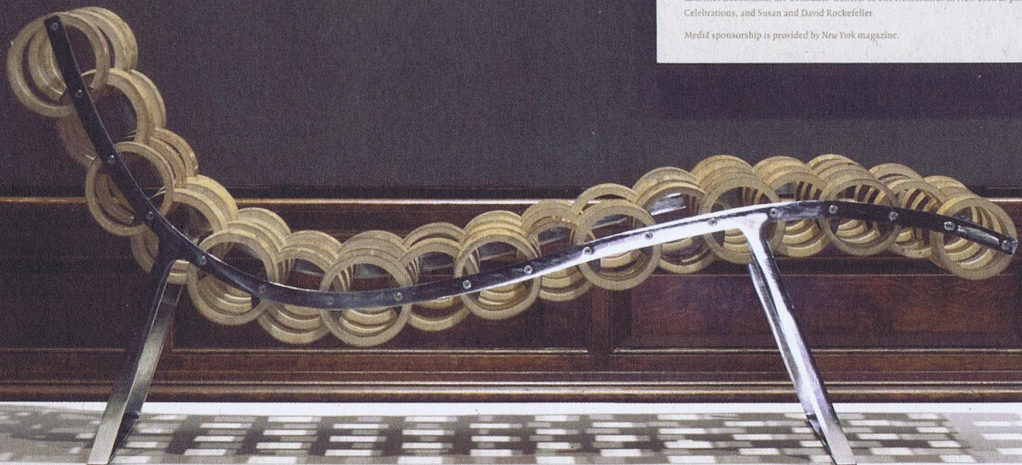
The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the natural world and the communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth. To learn more, visit nature.org.

design for a living world was developed by The Nature Conservancy

The exhibition's presentation at Cooper-Hewitt is made possible in part by Enid and Lester Morse.

Additional support is provided by the Adobe Foundation, Esme Usdan, Alice Gottesman and Lawrence Zuckerman, the Consulate-General of The Netherlands in New York as part of its w1400 Celebrations, and Susan and David Rockefeller.

Media sponsorship is provided by New York magazine.





Green Depot

Engaging (and sustainable) graphic communication helps Green Depot customers translate environmental research into educated building and life choices.

BY NAOMI PEARSON

Green Depot's founder, Sarah Beatty, opened her environmental living and building store on the Bowery in Manhattan to much fanfare in early 2009. As one *New York Times* reporter wrote, "A visit last week to Green Depot, an inspiring new store stocked with environmentally-sound home improvement supplies, greatly reduced my brain's environmental guilt emissions."

Amidst the food paints, soy concrete stains, and compost bins is an education in what it means to be green. Throughout the store, Green Depot's "Green Filter" icons guide consumers through their product selections by helping them examine their choices' impacts on five green living and building criteria: conservation, air quality, buying local, energy use, and social responsibility. A simple but bold graphics system leverages Green Depot's proprietary icons and reinforces the store's educational mission, using primarily black and white to express the idea of straightforwardness and transparency. "The big Idea," says graphic designer Lydia Turner (New York), "was simplicity, clarity, and explanation."



Telling the green story

Beatty wanted to define how Green Depot sees “green,” giving shoppers a clear context for all the considerations involved. She also wanted to share the stories behind the individual products. “Every product has a story—and a shared interest in creating something ‘better,’ ‘smarter.’ Whether it’s insulation made out of denim offcuts or paint made from food-based ingredients, or lumber that is harvested from sustainably managed forests, cool stories of innovation are inspiring,” says Beatty.

Architect Colin Brice of Mapos LLC (New York) developed the store concept around a collection of what he calls “interactives”—informative stations that allow customers to benefit from the in-depth research done by Green Depot’s own advisory council. The council ensures that Green Depot offers high-performance products that are truly green and not just “greenwashed.”

The retail space itself is a working example of re-use, adaptation, and sustainability. The building’s existing brick walls, wood-beamed ceiling, tile floors and columns, and stone lintels, for example, were restored and integrated with new building materials from Green Depot’s stock.

Mapos’ articulation of the space owes much to the graphic statements Turner was developing at the same time. “We were often in working sessions developing the materials and construction details of a certain fixture in conjunction with how Lydia was developing signage,” notes Brice. “Prime green principles were best communicated—and understood by the customer—by reinforcing the built work with graphics and vice versa.”

What is Greenwashing?

Green Depot explains the concept of “greenwashing” as “a term used to describe exaggerated, misleading, or inaccurate statements by a company regarding the environmental benefits of a product or service, or the environmental practices of the company.” Green Depot’s advisory council, made up of expert consultants from fields such as health, education, energy, real estate development, and architecture, ensures that customers receive accurate, up-to-date information on products they’re considering for purchase.

Opposite Green Depot is housed at 222 Bowery, an historic landmark that was New York’s first YMCA, home to the likes of artists Mark Rothko and Fernand Leger as well as beat writer William S. Burroughs. Original architectural details were preserved in Green Depot’s renovation. (Photo: Aimee Herring)

air quality, conservation, social responsibility, energy use, and buying local. (Photo: Dave Pinter/PSFK.com)

Below Oversized versions of the Green Filter icons, cut from 65% recycled-content sheet metal, are visible as shoppers enter—signaling the store’s commitment to accessible, simplified information about its products. (Photo: Dave Pinter/PSFK.com)

Left Green Depot’s Green Filter icon system helps shoppers evaluate products based on





The store's lighting booth, for example, uses bold graphics to show how low-energy light bulb options compare with traditional incandescent, while demonstrating how their light quality affects different architectural finishes.

Green accessible

Green Depot's icon system, designed by Dimitrious II (Brooklyn), was designed to illustrate product attributes at a glance, simplifying all the complex variables and trade-offs of sustainability, says Donald Franklin, Dimitrious II principal.

"The objective was to build a system where environmental concerns, lifestyle concerns, and building industry could exist in one conversation," he says. "Sarah Beatty would say, 'Make it 'green' accessible.'"

Steering clear of stereotypical "green" elements such as trees and sunny skies, the Dimitrious team wanted the icons to "open up a "direct and emotive conversation," adds Franklin. Popular culture icon elements served as reference points, helping the designers "understand how society is communicating through simple, easily identifiable symbols."

Shoppers are introduced to the icon system as soon as they enter the store. Oversized icons cut from 65% recycled-content sheet metal are mounted to an exposed brick wall immediately visible inside the entry. Throughout the store, updatable versions of the individual icons are printed on 5x7-in. or 8.5x11-in. kraft paper and

slipped inside simple, re-usable acrylic frames. The kraft paper can be recycled when products are changed or descriptions are edited based on new research.

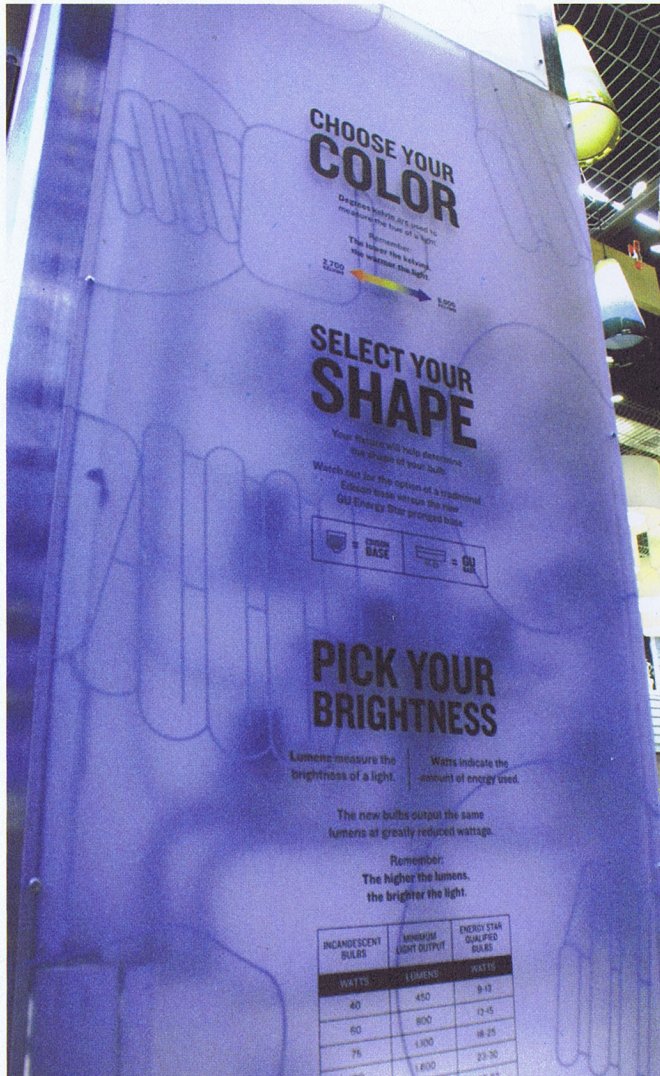
Behind the graphic expression of the icons lies the work of Jenny Gitlitz, Green Depot's director of environmental assessment. Gitlitz developed and administers the Green Filter system, including the awarding of icons to new products.

Invention informed by frugality

Store graphics present fresh, inventive vehicles for sustainable messaging. A frugal selection of recycled and re-used objects reduced the need for sourcing new signage material, underscoring the store's green mission. In the children's section, stuffed penguin "signs" made of organic canvas were hand-sewn by Turner and artist Shabd Simon-Alexander and secured in place with salvaged weights from a flea market.

The familiar "Home Sweet Home" sentiment is playfully reinterpreted on an embroidered sampler featuring a Henry David Thoreau quote: "What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?" The embroidery is framed by a re-used junk store find.

A desk made from a salvaged door and an old steel restaurant prep table (from Build it Green in Queens, the city's only non-profit retail outlet for salvaged and surplus building materials), displays products.





Project

Green Depot store, New York

Green Strategy

Working example of re-use, adaptation and sustainability; proprietary Green Filter icon system for evaluating building and household products

Materials

Organic cotton, flea market finds, salvaged goods, dustless chalk on re-usable chalkboards, formaldehyde-free MDF, Earthworks 88% recycled plastic store gift cards, 100% recycled paper, 3form ecoresin

Finishes

Zero-VOC Ivy paints applied directly to walls and floors (no additional substrates), soy ink by Amraninc

Production Notes

Unconventional materials and finishes tested extensively to ensure success



Opposite left A lighting booth—one of several “interactive” stations Mapos LLC designed to give shoppers the benefit of Green Depot research—was made from formaldehyde-free MDF instead of PVC or foamboard. (Photo: Dave Pinter/PSFK.com)

Opposite right Graphic designer Lydia Turner used primarily black and white to express the idea of straightforwardness and transparency. Graphics provider One Source painted the lettering directly on the floor using Ivy Coatings, a zero-VOC, non-toxic paint manufactured locally. (Photo: Lydia Turner)

Left above Green Depot gives shoppers the backstory behind such issues as sustainable lighting options, using simple graphics to compare low-energy bulb options with traditional incandescents. (Photo: Lydia Turner)

Left and below At the store's “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Refill” cleaning bar, bar tap handles with custom-designed labels pour no-VOC cleaners into re-usable containers. (Photos: Aimee Herring and Dave Pinter/PSFK.com)





Below A classic "Home Sweet Home" embroidered sampler is reimagined as a Henry David Thoreau statement on the planet we call home. (Photo: Lydia Turner)

Bottom Stuffed penguin "signs" made of organic canvas sit in the children's section, secured in place with salvaged weights from a flea market. (Photo: Lydia Turner)

GREEN DEPOT

Location New York

Client Green Depot

Design Team

Mapos LLC (architecture, experience, and interior design), Colin Brice, Caleb Mulvena (principals in charge)

Dimitrios II (filter icons and Green Depot identity), Donald Franklin, Kareem Collie (principals in charge) Lydia Turner (in-store graphics)

Consultants Shine Engineering (MEP engineering), IDEA Engineering (structural engineering), Kinetix LLC (LEED consultant), Johnson Light Studio (lighting consultant)

Fabrication One Source Visual Marketing Solutions (in-store graphics), MSD Visual (signage), SAAW Inc. (exterior sign), MG Concepts (fixtures), Good News, Auburn Sun Corp. (3D letters), NYCT (general contractor)

Signage: material as message

Green Depot's mission and message are reinforced in signage ranging from hanging chalkboards to recyclable product category signs made from cardboard boxes wrapped in kraft paper and stenciled with locally sourced, zero-VOC Ivy Coatings paint.

Three-dimensional letterforms used to spell out building construction terminology were made entirely from Green Depot materials by local art fabricator Jake Klotz. The words "insulate," "skin," "frame," and "pour" are cut out of the same materials used in those product categories. The "insulate" sign is made from radiant barrier insulation, cotton UltraTouch, Cel-pak (recycled newspapers), and Roxul mineral wool. The "skin" sign is cut from QuietWood sound-dampening plywood, low-emitting particleboard, and Advantech OSB. The "frame" sign is made from steel studs and FSC wood, while the "pour" is concrete containing reclaimed fly ash.

Andrea Lewen, senior account executive for project fabricator One Source Visual Marketing Solutions (New York) says the One Source team tested the environmentally preferable materials and methods Turner was interested in to make sure the print quality was good. One Source researched newly emerged materials and substrates as options if the test results were unsuccessful. "There was a lot of back and forth but we were all on the same page and trying to accomplish the same thing," says Lewen.

Direct-to-substrate imaging was also used in store signage to minimize the materials used. Stenciled letters were painted on the walls using low-VOC Ivy Coatings paint, a local product. "Supporting local manufacturers is something Green Depot is very committed to," says Beatty.

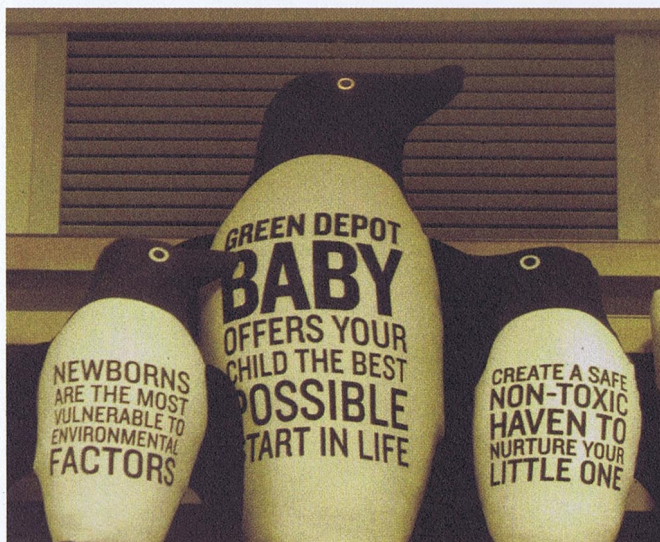
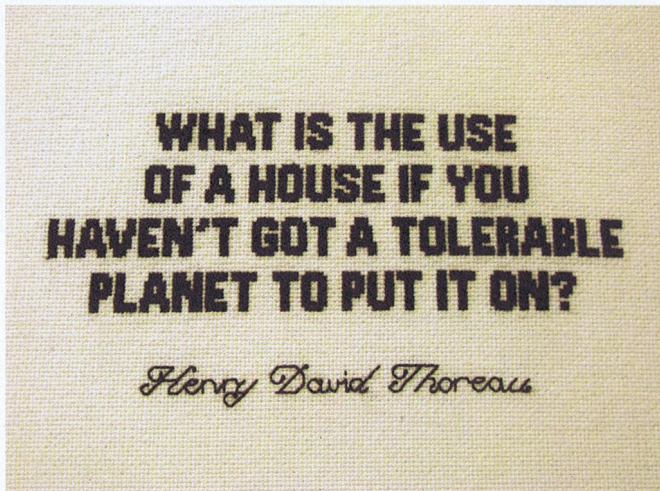
Gitlitz explains the store's reluctant use of vinyl, due to its suspected toxicity. "There were a few cases where we reluctantly had to use PVC lettering on wall signs. We really did not want to, since we strive to exclude vinyl-containing products in the store, but the alternative materials we explored for those wall sites were technically infeasible. I felt that in these cases, an exception could be made because the total amount of material used was very small (at most, a few ounces of stenciled-letter PVC), and because it facilitated customer education about green in the best possible way."

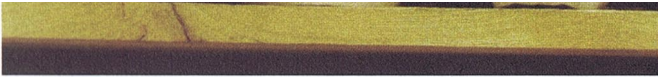
Green Depot also relies heavily on the perspectives of non-profit environmental organizations that have collected and analyzed evidence about PVC, including the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, the Healthy Building Network, and the National Resource Defense Council.

Setting the bar higher

The Bowery store received the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Platinum certification in early 2010. But Green Depot has its sights set even higher than achieving LEED's top rating. The store maintains its own rigorous standards for vetting and communicating environmentally preferable building and living products. Five Green Depot Advisory Council members continue to inform the store's inventory and messaging. Products undergo the store's stringent Green Filter process before hitting the shelves. And the results of this layered vetting system continue to be translated into engaging, straightforward graphic communications. Environmentally preferable choices are accessible to anyone who steps off the street and into the store. ☒

Guest Editor Naomi Pearson is a designer, illustrator, and consultant living in Brooklyn, NY. She also works for the Wildlife Conservation





Society's Exhibit and Graphic Arts Department in the Center for Global Conservation at the Bronx Zoo. She is a member of the SEGD Sustainability Forum.