



Michele Fitzpatrick Brings Brentano to Smart Home

“Sustainable design doesn’t mean an upholstered bale of hay,” jokes Michele Fitzpatrick, owner of Verde Design Studio. Fitzpatrick, a leader in sustainable design in Chicago, has recently been working as an interior designer for the “Smart Home: Green + Wired” exhibit set to open this May at Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry. Conceived by Michelle Kaufman Designs and built by All American Homes, the three-story functioning green home is 2,500 square feet. Fitzpatrick’s motivation for the project is twofold: she wants to both inspire and educate. She hopes that by taking the “mystery” out of energy efficient homes, people will understand that “everyone can incorporate sustainable design into their homes and lives.”

A major obstacle in designing the interior of the Smart Home was finding compatible, environmentally friendly textiles. In the past, Fitzpatrick explains, limited selections made this task frustrating. However, working with Brentano has been “a dream come true.” Fitzpatrick and those working on the home were “so thrilled to see a line that was so beautiful,” in addition to being reasonably priced and sustainable. When asked her favorite, Fitzpatrick first says “bamboo,” then pauses and says “and the Eco Wool,” then pauses again and says, “We really love them all,” and begins talking about the polyurethane faux leather textiles.

Because the Smart Home is designed for a young, urban couple with one or two children, sustainable textiles must also be durable. She calls the faux leather pattern Scuba, which is biodegradable and anti-bacterial, practically “indestructible.” These qualities are fitting for the children’s room, where it is used as upholstery on side rails and the headboard of a platform bed. Additionally, the faux leather Galaxy was used to upholster an Ottoman and Caress was used for a built-in bench.

At Verde, Fitzpatrick designs not only new, sustainable pieces, but also transforms resale items. She says the 43% recycled polyester fabric Second Chance is “the softest, most beautiful recycled polyester” she has ever seen, which makes the sofa reupholstered in it “one of the most beautiful pieces in the home.” She agrees it is amazing to think that the tailored bedspread made of the 100% recycled polyester textile Bark Cloth was once post consumer recycled plastic bottles.

When asked why she chose to use Brentano’s Bamboo Cloth not as upholstery, but as a throw, Fitzpatrick explains how they actually made two blankets— one for each floor. She says that since its going to strike visitors as so unusual, she wanted them to be able to “pick up the fabric and feel the hand,” to feel “how heavy and luxurious the fabric is.”

Fitzpatrick says that because Brentano’s green fabrics come in a range of colors, it wasn’t much of a struggle to complement the colors in the home. Interestingly, she found out after having selected the textiles that the architect had her own line of paint that they would be using in the rooms for accents. She says it just so happened that the fabrics they had selected “match perfectly.”



Having been involved in sustainable design for years, Fitzpatrick has worked with many companies. She says when she asks manufacturers why they don't develop more sustainable fabrics, she usually receives one of two responses: either they just don't want to change, or they remark that they probably should cash in on the trend. In Brentano, she sees a company that "truly cares about the environment" and is willing to "take a chance and put a product out there that is innovative."

The "Smart Home: Green + Wired" exhibit opens May 8, 2008, and runs through January 4, 2009 at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois.

Brentano's green fabrics can be seen in the following areas of the Smart Home*:

Bamboo Cloth (5012-01 Moon, 5012-05 Footbridge) Throw blankets

Bark Cloth (2538-02 Morning) Tailored bedspread in master suite

Caress (3911-09 Otter) Bench in lounge area

Eco Flannel (7170-04 Bluebird) Bed pillows for master suite, upholstery on used mid-century modern chair

Eco Flannel (7170-07 Rhino) Platform bed in master suite with tufted headboard

Galaxy (3987-09 Eris) Ottoman in lounge area

Scuba (3940-01 Shell) Upholstered side rails and headboard of platform bed in the nongender child's room

Second Chance (6530-04 Arm in Arm) Reupholstered resale sofa

*subject to change prior to exhibit opening

