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Designing with a Conscience and a Budget

IS THERE ANYONE IN THE INDUSTRY WHO IS NOT AWARE OF THE NEED FOR ECOLOGICAL DESIGNS THAT PROVIDE GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY?

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The government's target of an 80 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 will require all designers to make some considerable changes to the way we design for both commercial and residential projects.

In addition, the current economic climate means that now, more than ever, we must ensure that every pound spent will provide our clients with good design that is both environmentally friendly and long lasting.

Eco-design is defined as design that has consideration for the environmental impacts of the design throughout the whole lifecycle. This lifecycle includes the procurement, manufacture, use and disposal of products used in a design project and results in many complicated environmental choices. Combine these choices with budgetary constraints and aesthetic considerations and it is amazing that any decisions are made at all! But the difficulty in making these choices as we prepare our designs and guide our clients should not result in

our dodging these important issues. We should all strive to lead a more thoughtful as well as efficient life.

It is useful to consider a number of ideas that are currently doing the rounds. The most important theme is known as the three R's (forget your school days!) of Reduce/Reuse/Recycle. This simple mantra forms the basis of the 'waste hierarchy' and is a powerful guide to developing your ability to design in an eco-friendly manner. **REDUCE** is about considering ways to reduce the amount of resources consumed by a project. These can range from the basic utilities of water, gas and electricity as well as other goods supplied. **REUSE** takes into account not only the more obvious idea of incorporating antiques and vintage items into a scheme but also considers whether the methods used to produce new goods are well managed and sustainable. **RECYCLE** refers to the end of the life of the products and methods we use and whether they can be broken down into their component parts to be returned to the soil or re-



used to make new products. The hierarchy of the 3R's is important and they should be considered in that order. Another twist in our thinking involves viewing design and the products we specify as being 'cradle to cradle' rather than 'cradle to grave'. Cradle to cradle design views waste as a product of bad design and we should ensure that our designs incorporate as many reusable and recyclable elements as possible.

There are many complex and highly engineered products available that can and should be incorporated into good design, but we should also consider simpler methods. If the budget will not stretch to replacing existing windows with new double or triple glazed units make sure there are draft excluders and heavy curtains for insulation and that clients are instructed to draw them Simple thermostatic valves on radiators

can be used if underfloor heating is a step too far. And always instruct your client to trade up – buying quality that will last is always more economical and eco-friendly in the long term than buying cheap and disposing of the item after a few years.

All of these ideas and more will be discussed at the British Institute of Design Retrofit Conference being held on Friday March 11th. The goal of the conference is to raise awareness and provide strategies for the interior designer to help deliver the government's targets for reduction of carbon emissions. It will also provide designers with the opportunity to explore the strategies and skills required to retrofit existing buildings to make them more energy efficient and to capitalise on the commercial opportunities available in this growing market sector.