

# A "70s" House Goes Green

- by Kathy Hyzy

**M**y partner and I love our house: it's just the right size for the two of us (and three cats and a dog), in a quiet neighborhood, and close to a bike route. Until a year ago, it was also dark, ugly and downright grim inside.

Built in 1966, many of the rooms felt like well-worn time capsules from the '70s – lots of dark wood paneling, shag carpet and torn vinyl flooring. We needed to make some big changes, but we didn't want to use toxic building materials, and the remodel needed to be affordable. Fortunately, we were able to do both much more easily than we expected!

The shag carpet just had to go. In fact, because we have pets, we didn't want any carpeting, which captures hair, dust, and toxins you might track in on your shoes. Instead, we installed bamboo flooring. Yes, it's more expensive than hardwood, but it's stunningly beautiful, durable, and made from one of the fastest-growing plants in the world. Bamboo is fairly easy to find in Oregon; make sure to inquire about low-formaldehyde glues and low-toxin finishes. For comfort underfoot, we used a recycled-tire underlayment beneath the planks.



Moxie loves the new bamboo floor, too, especially with bubbles!

We also needed to replace the vinyl floors in the kitchen and bathroom, and wanted a more natural alternative. I have many fond memories of my grandma's crazy blue mushroom-themed kitchen, and the checkerboard linoleum floor is part of them. I was delighted to

find that Marmoleum – the trade name for linoleum – is still around, and better than ever. Made from compressed plant fibers, linseed oil, and other natural products, it comes in a wide range of colors and in sheets or tiles.

We got a very good deal on a roll of a discontinued color we love. After a year, I have had to re-seal it once to put some shine back on (which was easy) and it's still easy to clean.

The wood paneling is also history, replaced by a fresh coat of paint.

Anyone who has ever painted a room knows, however, that the smell can drive you away for days. So, rather than sleep on the porch for a week and expose ourselves to VOCs (volatile organic compounds, many of which are cancer-causing and cause respiratory health issues), we chose to use VOC-free paints. You can find a complete list of manufacturers at [www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org).

Last, but not least, we wanted to make our home more energy efficient. In an average home, windows are the single largest source of heat loss in the winter. After I duct-taped the kitchen windows to keep out the wind, I realized ours had to be even worse than average.

When it started getting cold last winter, we realized we needed not only a new gas furnace, but some serious insulation upgrades. The Energy Trust's website ([www.energytrust.org](http://www.energytrust.org)) guided us to dealers and installers who know how to help clients take full advantage of all the rebates. We received hundreds of dollars back on our high-efficiency gas furnace, and hundreds more on the floor and ceiling insulation we added. Plus, we can now get out of bed in the winter without our toes going numb, and our heating bills are half as expensive!

We also installed honeycomb shades, which are easy to clean, filter the light prettily, and provide some



Kathy loves her new bamboo floor!

insulation while also blocking drafts. And this summer, we are replacing our single-pane aluminum frame window dinosaurs. Although vinyl is energy-efficient, we didn't want to invite vinyl into our home, so we ordered windows from the Renewal line made by Andersen. The only windows to earn a Green Seal rating, the frames are made from a recycled wood/plastic composite, and are Energy Star approved.

With my remodeling nearly done, I now actually look forward to going home every day.

- Former OEC Project Manager Kathy Hyzy lives in southeast Portland.

## Hot Tip!

For more information on green home makeovers, visit the City of Seattle's "Green Home Remodel" website, [www.cityofseattle.net/sustainablebuilding](http://www.cityofseattle.net/sustainablebuilding), which offers room- and project-specific guides to making your remodel healthier for your family and the planet.