

# GREEN BROWNSTONE

*One couple transforms an 1885 Upper West Side townhouse into a stylish model for sustainable design.*

BY NANCY A. BURNING PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA SELL HALL



EASYGOING GREEN  
FOR LISA SHARKEY AND PAUL GELTNER,  
SITTING ON A FORMER DEER FINE,  
SUSTAINABLE WOODSUCKER BY DESPORA,  
REINFORCING WITH ECO-FRIENDLY  
MATERIALS WAS A TERRIFIC EXPERIENCE.  
COSTING ZERO A FEW PERCENT MORE,  
TAKING NO EXTRA TIME, AND STILL  
ALLOWING FOR FUTURE DESIGN.

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*“We wanted to inspire people and to give back to the earth, and to teach our children the importance of this,” says Lisa Sharkey on going green.*

The outside of Lisa Sharkey and Paul Gleicher's recently renovated 1885 townhouse is white, but don't let that fool you. Underneath the new low-VOC paint, a green brownstone grows in Manhattan.

From the low-E argon-filled thermally insulated wood-clad front door and the environmentally friendly limestone look-alike floor tiles in the foyer to the Energy Star-rated ConservaGlass glazing in the conservatory at its top, the five-floor, sophisticated, haute-design home is an unabashedly green leaf in the concrete jungle.

Sharkey, who runs Al Roker's TV production company, and Gleicher, an architect whose clients have included the actors Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick and former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, gave themselves the green light to go green because, Sharkey says, “we wanted to inspire people and to give back to the earth, and to teach our children the importance of this.”

The Upper West Side property was perfect for greening because it was a gut job: None of the vintage architectural elements, not even the distinctive brownstone façade, survived, and the infrastructure, including the original 18-foot-long joists, had to be replaced.

“It was my idea to go green,” Sharkey says. “I had met a couple who had just completed a green house in California, and we had just closed on this house. I just had one of those Eureka! moments and said, ‘Wow, we could do this. We should do this.’”

Going green, they were pleasantly surprised to find, didn't cost a bank vault full of greenbacks. “You don't have to be rich to do this,” Gleicher says. “I estimated that it only cost 5 percent to 10 percent more to go green. And part of that was because some of the products, like the kitchen cabinets, which are formaldehyde-free, had to be shipped from Oregon because we couldn't find them in New York.”

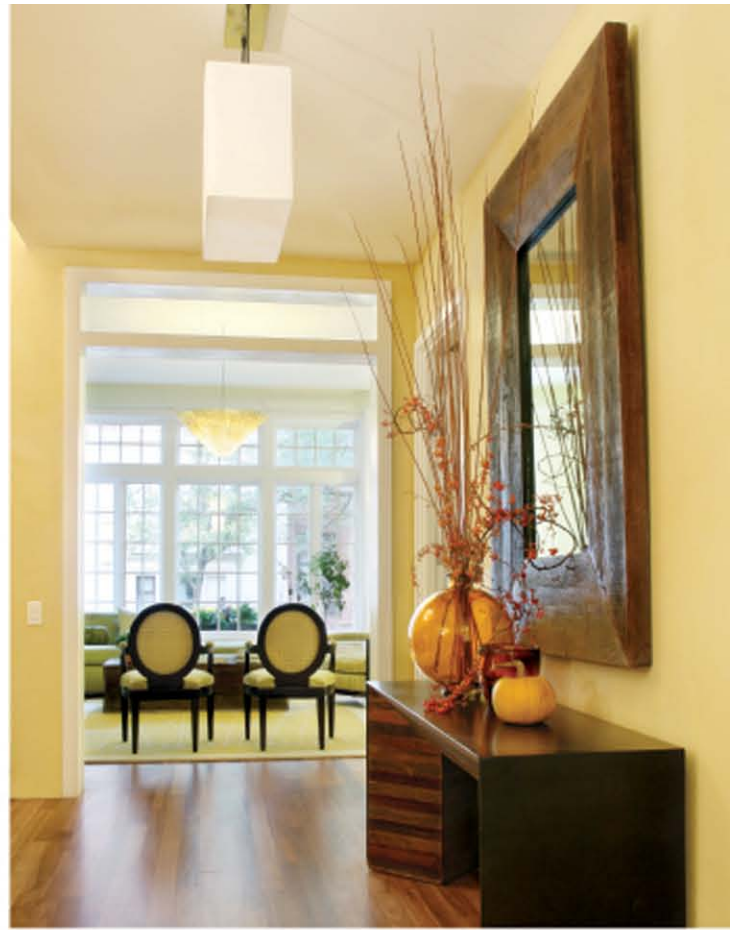
Sharkey adds that little things, including low-odor, low-to-zero-VOC paints, and compact fluorescent light bulbs, are good ways to start the greening. “You certainly don't have to do a six-figure renovation.”

Although going green did not take longer—construction was ongoing for a year under the supervision of contractor George Constant of Abigail Hess Interiors and continued even after the family moved in—it did take a while to research the products. “It was hard, but it was fun-hard to find things,” Sharkey says. “It became an obsession of mine to be pristine. Sometimes, we would be on the Internet looking up things until two in the morning.”

That's how they found Imagine Tiles, which are made

HEARTH CENTERED  
THIS RESEAL-RESISTANT  
FIREPLACE OPERATES AS  
SMOOTHLY AS IT LOOKS, WITH A  
RECYCLED GLASS AND CONCRETE  
SURROUND AND A RESEAL-  
RESISTANT STAINLESS STEEL FLUE.







from environmentally recycled materials and whose production process uses recycled water. And that's where they discovered Neil Kelly of Oregon who made the Asian-style, formaldehyde-free pearwood cabinetry throughout the house. "It was almost prohibitively expensive to get the cabinetry because it had to be shipped across the country," Gleicher says. "It nearly doubled the cost. When you do this, it's best to stay with local companies, but we couldn't find one." Other green products, including the bamboo tables from the Todd Oldham by La-Z-Boy Collection, the Marvin windows and doors, and the Sherwin Williams paints, were easier to find.

They also made sure their three children—15-year-old Greg, 14-year-old Doug, and eight-year-old Casey—were actively involved in the design decisions. Casey, for example, chose the funky flower-power design on the ecofriendly self-stick carpet blocks by Interface Flor for her bedroom, and all three children voted a resounding yes for putting Imagine Tile's ceramic tiles of poolside images on the floors of their bath and neighboring laundry room so they can feel as though they literally are walking on water.

Sharkey and Gleicher began with the basics: a high-efficiency boiler and hot-water heater; independently controlled hot-water radiators that double as wall décor; a water filtration system; wood joists and other lumber products that use fast-growing, small-diameter trees efficiently and that don't damage old-growth forests or tropical rainforests; studs made from fast-growing aspen and poplar trees that are debarked and shredded into strands that are coated with a formaldehyde-free binder; insulation that features a vapor barrier; a central vacuum system to remove dust; water-saving faucets and dual-flush toilets; and heated towel racks that replace bathroom radiators. "The air's clean, the water's clean, there's as much light as possible—that's why the windows we put in are so gigantic yet [the house] doesn't look out of place on the block because the windows have mullions," Sharkey

says. "The brownstone still maintains some of its historic character."

Adds Gleicher: "All the water is filtered, not just the water in the sinks. You can get residue buildup in appliances and showers if you don't do this. In the master bathroom, the whirlpool is an air-jet that is self-purging, so there's no potential for mold and bacteria."

Then they carried the green theme over into the décor with the help of Gleicher's in-house designer, David Barry. "We chose a modern aesthetic," Sharkey says, "because we wanted to show people that you don't have to be crunchy-fee, log cabin to be ecofriendly." Sharkey points to Desiron's high-style sectional sofa in the living room; it is made of responsibly harvested wood and is formaldehyde-free. "The color scheme of the entire brownstone intentionally is green," Sharkey says. "The fabric we selected for the sofa is called 'Leaf,' so I thought, 'That's a sign; let's go for it.'"

The kitchen, which overlooks a neighboring brownstone covered in green ivy, greens up with shiny celadon and cream countertops from IceStone, a Brooklyn company, that are made of recycled glass and concrete. The dining chairs and banquette in the breakfast room go double green with gorgeous sustainable fabrics by Angela Adams; and the backsplash sparkles with inch-square swimming-pool green, sky blue, and cloud-white recycled-glass tiles from Oceanside Glasstile in California. "Yes, the Oceanside Glasstile is a little bit more expensive," Sharkey says, "but I like to feel better about the stuff, too. These products have heart, and I want to be able to go home after a long, hard day at work and feel really good about what my house looks like—also, more importantly, the friendliness it exudes."

Appointed with energy-efficient Bosch appliances, the kitchen is rounded out by pieces from Environment Furniture

#### PRODUCTS WITH HEART

ABOVE: WITH CONTEMPORARY STYLED, FORMALDEHYDE-FREE PEARWOOD CABINETS, A RECYCLED GLASS BACKSPLASH, AND ICESTONE COUNTERTOPS, THIS KITCHEN IS GREEN BUT NOT "CRUNCHY-FEELY." CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: SUSTAINABLE UPHOLSTERY CARRIES THE "INTENTIONALLY GREEN" DECOR INTO THE BREAKFAST NOOK; MULLIONED WINDOWS FORM THE LIVING ROOM'S FOCUS AND RETAIN THE BUILDING'S HISTORIC CHARACTER; THE MASTER BATH FEATURES SELF-PURGING, WATER-SAVING FIXTURES AND CELADON ACCENTS; WARM TONES AND DESIRON'S MINIMALIST DINING SET CREATE AN UNDERSTATED COZINESS.





that are made from reclaimed wood and is linked to the dining room via the renewable lyptus hardwood flooring, the IceStone fireplace surround, and the pearwood mantel that matches the kitchen cabinets.

The sleek fireplace from Bellfires, complete with a residue-resistant stainless steel flue, is a vision of efficiency. "You can burn three cords of wood in it, and you only get one cup of ashes," Gleicher says proudly.

Sharkey ushers a visitor into the master suite, where green meets the eye and soothes the soul. The color scheme, which is set by IceStone's Denim Sky on the bathroom countertop and floor, is carried through on the organic, nontoxic furniture Gleicher designed and had fabricated by Furniture. "We found a company, Loomstate, that makes organic denim, so we upholstered the bed and bench in dungarees," Sharkey says.

She folds back the duvet to reveal a feather-soft Natural Comfort organic mattress. "Most mattresses are made with formaldehyde," she says, grimacing. "Who would want to sleep on that?"

Gleicher points out the his-and-her closet; it's a walk-in, but that's not what he's excited about. "It's made by California Closets out of a new low-emission particleboard, and there's no urea added in manufacturing," he says, adding, "Phenol formaldehydes, in proper formulation, don't off-gas nearly as much as urea-formaldehyde glues."

Sharkey and Gleicher's top green project is the one on the roof, where a Four Seasons glass conservatory whose panes are twice as energy-conserving as conventional ones stands. It literally leads to a "green roof," a living garden of green sedum rimmed by shiny ink-black river stones. "It was delivered live and rolled up," Sharkey says of the sedum ground covering, "and hoisted by crane up here. It keeps the house cooler in summer and warmer in winter. And it reduces air pollution, including greenhouse gases. If everyone in Manhattan had a green roof, the temperature in the city would go down five degrees." As she speaks, her words are punctuated by the low, slow gurgle of a stainless steel water sculpture by artist Tudor Farmer that was made of recycled materials.

Gleicher demonstrates the energy-efficient window-blind system, which allows them to control the amount of light and heat entering the conservatory. "I feel it is my responsibility as an architect to inform my clients that they have choices and that a green choice is a better choice," he says.

Now that the project is finished, Sharkey and Gleicher will be making another contribution to the greening of the planet: They want to donate the brownstone's original 18-foot-long wooden joists to a company that makes furniture of recycled wood.

Although they realize that theirs is not a typical family—they eat organic food exclusively and embrace homeopathic medicine—Sharkey and Gleicher hope that others will look at their project and cultivate their own green thumbs. "This is the fourth residence that we have renovated for our growing family," Sharkey says. "I don't know whether it will be our last, but I'd like it to be among the last houses. I don't want to leave this one."

Like a little girl playing hopscotch, she jumps from one green IceStone slab to another, dodging the gentle rooftop raindrops. "Listen, you can hear the crickets!" she exclaims. She cocks her head to the side. Sure enough, amid the roar of traffic and the clackety-crash of a garbage truck below, there sounds, from the river stones, a solitary but strong "Chirrup!" ■





# GREEN BROWNSTONE RESOURCE LIST



OCEANSIDE GLASSTILE



ATLAS CONCORDE WALL TILE



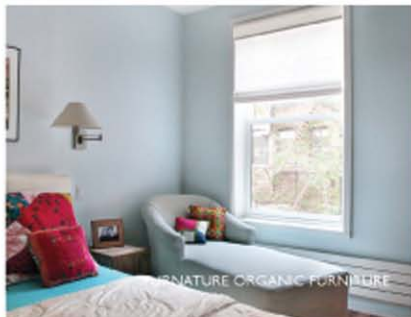
ICESTONE COUNTERTOPS



DESIRON FURNITURE



HUNTER DOUGLAS WINDOW SHADES



FURNITURE ORGANIC FURNITURE

## CLOSET INTERIORS: CALIFORNIA CLOSETS

Custom-designed closet interiors using formaldehyde-free SkyBlend particleboard. **CONTACT:** [www.caldosets.com](http://www.caldosets.com)

## FLOOR AND WALL TILE: ATLAS CONCORDE

Textured like brushed concrete, double-fired "View" style wall tiles come in five neutral and four rich colors, perfect for minimalist to vibrant decors. **CONTACT:** [www.atlasconcorde.it](http://www.atlasconcorde.it)

## FLOOR AND WALL TILE: RAGNO

Designed to transform walls into theatrical backdrops of everyday life, this brand's simplicity of materials and natural and bright colors imbue interiors with a soothing but decidedly modern, family-like atmosphere. Basic: Porcelain Ceramic Floor and Wall Tile. Origami: Porcelain Feature Strip. **CONTACT:** [www.Ragno.it](http://www.Ragno.it)

## GLASS TILE: OCEANSIDE GLASSTILE

Located in Carlsbad, California, Oceanside Glasstile produces luxury glass tiles containing 86 percent recycled bottles and silica sand, a renewable resource. Tessera Mosaics for Walls and Floors can be used to produce a variety of field patterns, border designs and medallions. **CONTACT:** [www.glasstile.com](http://www.glasstile.com)

## LINOLEUM FLOORING: FORBO FLOORING, INC.

Marmoleum Click Floor Tiles are ecologically produced by pressing flax seeds to create linseed oil, which in turn is mixed with pine resins and wood flour.

**CONTACT:** PO Box 667, Humboldt Industrial Park, Hazleton, PA, 18201. [www.themarmoleumstore.com](http://www.themarmoleumstore.com)

## INTERIOR PAINT: SHERWIN WILLIAMS

Harmony Interior Latex Coating and Duration Home Interior Latex Coating

These are low odor, zero- or low-VOC paints, both washable and durable, with anti-microbial properties, and their terrific color selections. **CONTACT:** [www.sherwin-williams.com](http://www.sherwin-williams.com)

## COUNTERTOPS: ICESTONE

Denim Sky and Sage Pearl: Concrete and Recycled Glass Matrix for Kitchen Countertops and Master Bath Countertops. IceStone countertops, floors, and vanity tops are made from

recycled glass and concrete, blended and set into slabs, polished to look like terrazzo. IceStone surfaces are strong as granite, not as porous as marble, and heat-resistant like stone. The chemical composition is benign and 99.5 percent inorganic, making it a very safe material regarding toxicity and fire resistance. The company's policies are green, and this is a local company, located at the Brooklyn Navy Yards. **CONTACT:** [www.icestone.biz](http://www.icestone.biz)

## SUSTAINABLE FABRICS: ANGELA ADAMS

Angela Adams is known worldwide for her modern rugs, and she has just come out with a line of signature sustainable fabrics. **CONTACT:** [www.angeloadams.com](http://www.angeloadams.com)

## CENTRAL VACUUM SYSTEM: BEAM INDUSTRIES

This built-in cleaning appliance cleans house and improves indoor air quality simultaneously. Research shows Beam systems remove 100 percent of contacted dirt, dust mites, pollen, dander and other allergens. **CONTACT:** [www.beamvac.com](http://www.beamvac.com)

## APPLIANCES: BOSCH

These world-renowned appliances are elegant, use 60 percent less water and 68 percent less electricity, and cut waste in half. Refrigerator, Dishwasher, Double Convection Oven, Warming Drawer, Gas Cooktop, Kitchen Exhaust Hood, Microwave, Clothes Washer and Gas Clothes Dryer. **CONTACT:** [www.boschappliances.com](http://www.boschappliances.com)

## MEDICINE CABINETS: ROBERN

Designlogic MP24D4FN. Robern's solid aluminum framed construction provides rust-free operation and durability. SafeSeal gasketed frames protect against sharp edges and prevent dirt and moisture from entering the cabinets. **CONTACT:** [www.roberrn.com](http://www.roberrn.com)

## PUBLIC ROOMS FURNITURE: DESIRON

Thompson Sectional Sofa, Simon Side Table, Floor Lamp, Madison Dining Table, Barrow Bar Stools. Desiron does not use any formaldehyde and uses woods that are environmentally correct. They make everything at their factory in New Jersey, so shipping was energy efficient. Their style is minimalist, yet classic. **CONTACT:** [www.desiron.com](http://www.desiron.com)

## BEDROOM FURNITURE: FURNATURE

Master Bedroom Bed, Mattress, Chaise, Bench, Chair. Traditional bedding contains synthetic materials and an abundance of chemicals such as formaldehyde and arsenic, which off-gasses harmful vapors throughout the night. Furniture produces green bedding in Massachusetts; their green policies are world-renowned. **CONTACT:** [www.furniture.com](http://www.furniture.com)

## WINDOW SHADES: HUNTER DOUGLAS

Luminette Privacy Sheers' translucent fabric facings and soft fabric vanes that rotate for infinite degrees of light control and privacy; Alustra Woven Textures Roman Shades are light-filtering alternatives to solar screens. **CONTACT:** [www.hunterdouglas.com](http://www.hunterdouglas.com)

## ROOFTOP WATER FEATURE: TUDOR FARMER

The Water Veil, made at Two Rivers Farm in Denton, MD, is half stainless steel screen, half muntz screen. Cascading water creates lovely, complex patterns, and emits captivating sounds. The water veil can be made of stone, glass, wood, and can be up to 40 feet high. **CONTACT:** (310) 621-8977

## MASTER BATH FAUCETS, SINK, AND SHOWER: LEFROY BROOKS

XO and JO Faucets' thermostatic valves for shower and bath prevent scalding and save water by allowing quick adjustment of water temperature. Also, Lefroy Brooks ships all products in recycled packaging. **CONTACT:** [www.lefroybrooks.com](http://www.lefroybrooks.com)

## MASTER BATH WHIRLPOOL SPA: BAINULTRA

This Canadian company has literally changed the face of bathing. Origami 7242 uses soothing air jets instead of water jets, preventing mold and mildew. The tub self-purges so no standing water remains in the jets. Chromatherapy bathes the water in colored light. **CONTACT:** [www.bainultra.com](http://www.bainultra.com)

## PLUMBING FIXTURE SUPPLIER:

## SIMONS HARDWARE AND BATH

Designer Rick Shaver provides a twist on traditionalism for his fixtures. **CONTACT:** 421 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, New York, NY 10016 [www.simons-hardware.com](http://www.simons-hardware.com)

continued on page 48



# GREEN BROWNSTONE RESOURCE LIST

continued from page 36

## WHOLE HOUSE WATER FILTRATION SYSTEM:

### ECOWATER

This water treatment system, installed in the basement, filters all water coming into the home. This ensures cleaner, softer laundry; luxurious, foaming baths; safer, tastier drinking and cooking water; odor-free ice; and extended life for appliances, faucets and pipes. This system pays for itself. **CONTACT:** [www.ecowater.com](http://www.ecowater.com)

## BOILER AND HOT WATER SYSTEMS: WEIL MCLAIN

These systems save energy and operate more efficiently. The boiler does all the work for the water heater, sending its hot water into the 80-gallon tank in the cellar. The indirect-fired water heaters produce twice the peak flow of a tankless coil, at least 50 percent more than a comparably sized direct-fired gas water heater, and three times as much as an electric unit. **CONTACT:** [www.weil-mclain.com](http://www.weil-mclain.com)

## IN-LINE VENTILATION FANS FOR BATHROOMS AND LAUNDRY ROOM: BROAN

Ventilating noxious indoor air contaminants is crucial to health. Broan's MP280 Multi-Port In-Line Ventilation Fans not only exhaust foul air, but are silent because they are located just below the roof, away from the bathrooms and laundry room. **CONTACT:** [www.broan.com](http://www.broan.com)

## HOT WATER RADIATORS AND TOWEL WARMERS: MYSON RADIATORS

Décor Panel Radiators, Column Radiator, Cavatine White Hydronic Towel Warmer

Myson is an ISO 9002 Certified Manufacturer. These sleek, painted white steel radiators and towel warmers allow us to efficiently heat our home with gentle radiant heat while not sacrificing space or aesthetics. **CONTACT:** [www.mysoninc.com](http://www.mysoninc.com)

## LIVING ROOM RUG: LIZA PHILLIPS

"String Game" Rug Liza Phillips has been exhibiting her artwork for 25 years. The rug is woven at 60 knots per inch and colored

with certified environmentally-friendly Swiss dyes. It bears both the Rugmark label, guaranteeing no child labor, and the Nepal Eco-Wash label.

**CONTACT:** [www.lzaphillipsdesign.com](http://www.lzaphillipsdesign.com)

## DECORATIVE LIGHTING: YLIGHTING

Ylighting is the largest online retailer of high-end modern lighting, including low-voltage monorail lighting, table 24 lighting, iconic design pieces and hard-to-find imported fixtures. They ship orders quickly in contrast to the four-month industry standard. **CONTACT:** [www.ylighting.com](http://www.ylighting.com)

## EXTERIOR WALL SCONCES: MURRAY FEISS

Lighthouse Sconces Local company Murray Feiss of the Bronx has been manufacturing lighting for over 50 years. Triple-plated, powder-coated lacquer assures it weather resistance and lasting beauty. **CONTACT:** [www.feiss.com](http://www.feiss.com)

## LIVING ROOM COFFEE TABLE, CHILDREN'S TRUNDLE BEDS: ENVIRONMENT FURNITURE

This company's trademark is eco-conscious design. Their current line features reclaimed 100-year-old Brazilian wood is combined with new materials and ergonomic.

**CONTACT:** [www.environmentfurniture.com](http://www.environmentfurniture.com)

## LIVING ROOM AND BOY'S ROOM CEILING LIGHTING FIXTURES: GALBRAITH & PAUL

Large Funnel Pendant was hand-block-printed in a Philadelphia studio. **CONTACT:** [www.galbraithandpaul.com](http://www.galbraithandpaul.com)

## CHILDREN'S BEDROOM CARPETS: INTERFACE INC.

One of the world's greenest carpet manufacturers, Interface's Flor carpet tiles are versatile, practical, easy to install, and available in a wide variety of colors, textures, and patterns. With so many options, you can become your own designer; and redecorator whenever the whim strikes you. **CONTACT:** [www.interfaceinc.com](http://www.interfaceinc.com)

## POWDER ROOM, BOY'S BATH, AND LAUNDRY ROOM: IMAGINE TILE, INC.

Imagine Tile, Inc. pioneered the art of incorporating high resolution, digital images in ceramic tile. These extremely durable, commercially rated tiles boast unbelievably realistic images and are unaffected by sunlight, strong chemicals, fire, water or wear. We chose Water, Blush, and Canyon tiles. **CONTACT:** [www.imagine tile.com](http://www.imagine tile.com)

## CHILDREN'S MATTRESSES: COVEREST MATTRESSES

We chose Coverest's pure, safe, chemical-free Bamboo Sleep System mattresses. **CONTACT:** [www.coverest.com](http://www.coverest.com)

## SUNROOM FURNITURE: TODD OLDHAM FOR LA-Z-BOY

New La-Z-Boy partner Todd Oldham, known for forward-thinking design, combines style, comfort, durability, and accessibility, has designed a complete line of home furnishings, occasional furniture, and a reclining chair. **CONTACT:** [www.la-z-boy.com](http://www.la-z-boy.com)

## SNOW MELTING AT ROOF GUTTERS: EASY HEAT

SnoMelter® and MI Trace™ heating cable systems provide economical snow and ice removal. Installed beneath the surface, these cables heat the surface area to above freezing, melting any ice or snow on the surface. **CONTACT:** [www.easyheat.com](http://www.easyheat.com)

## INTERIOR PLASTER: AMERICAN CLAY EARTH PLASTERS

Manufactured in and using materials from the US, American Clay uses natural clays, recycled and reclaimed aggregates, and vibrant natural pigments. Earth Plasters are non-dusting, mold and fade resistant, repairable and moisture controlling. **CONTACT:** [www.americanclay.com](http://www.americanclay.com)

## LIGHT FIXTURE SUPPLIER: MSK ILLUMINATIONS

Fiber-Optic lighting, long in commercial use, is now popular in homes for its energy efficiency, lack of generated heat, resistance to moisture, safety from shock, and ability to filter out ultraviolet rays, making it perfect for artwork. Affordable. **CONTACT:** Fibestars, (800) 327-7877; or MSK Illuminations, (212) 888-6474 ■



LIZA PHILLIPS RUG



MYSON RADIATORS



FLOR CARPET TILES



ENVIRONMENT FURNITURE



AMERICAN CLAY EARTH PLASTER