

Home Be Greened?

Real People + Real Problems + Real Solutions

Cheryl Terrace

If you think it's hard living in New York City, try living in "the greatest city in the world" with chemical sensitivities. After September 11, Manhattan resident Julie Genser discovered she was more susceptible to environmental toxins and irritants and decided that she needed to purify her 250-square-foot West Village studio apartment. Julie had already acquired a HEPA air filter, drinking-water filtration, organic bedding, and natural-spectrum lighting when she contacted *Natural Home* to help complete her nontoxic home.

As a green interior design consultant, I always start with a lifestyle analysis, which includes a review of basic health issues such as air and water quality and allergy sensitivity. Equally, I like to address aesthetic issues that are often overlooked once an interior has been turned into a functional living environment. For Julie, those questions centered around being a city dweller in a tiny apartment. Specifically, the challenge was to achieve a "Zen den" oasis in a chaotic city environment.

Making space

The way a space is perceived when you enter it and how it feels the longer you stay in it impacts the psyche, which in turn affects overall health. This concept—often referred to as *feng shui*, *vastu*, or energy movement—is key to creating a healthful home. I advise clients like Julie who live in small spaces to work with scale and create positive aesthetic impact by having one large item—either oversize paintings or

large mirrors as "visual expanders"—in a smaller room. This helps create a vista and acts as a second window.

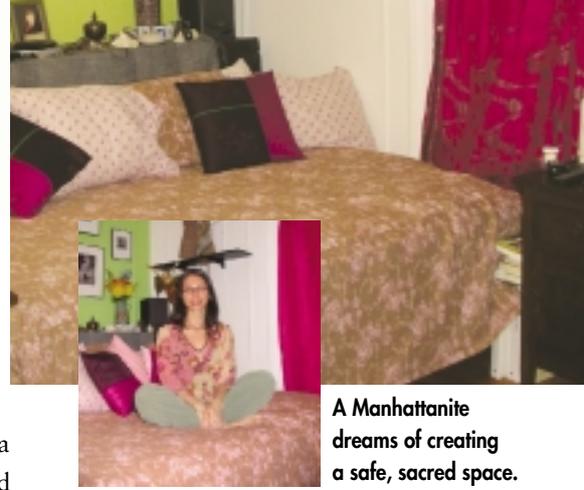
You can also give a small space more depth through creative use of light. For example, use different sources of illumination such as accent lights in bookcases or canisters on the floor that wash walls with light. Working with furniture on different planes—placing the bed high, or table and chairs on bar-height level—makes a minimal space seem multi-layered. Furniture with legs as opposed to skirts is another expansive technique.

Personalizing your surroundings through the use of images, objects, and artifacts helps you tap your creative power and bring unique purpose to your environment. Because she was seeking a romantic relationship, Julie made an altar out of a simple shelf with candles and images of people and animals in pairs—things that represent partnership.

We also tackled storage issues by placing baskets under tables and in other underutilized areas. I suggested employing every square inch of her closet space by hanging as many hooks and shelves as possible. I also like to use plants as restorative decoration. I recommended lining Julie's windowsills with plants to help detoxify her space and add an element of nature to an apartment in a city where only a chosen few have a view of green.

Addressing EMFs

I am also a baubiologist—someone who studies the relationship between buildings and human and planetary health. One of baubiology's main focuses



A Manhattanite dreams of creating a safe, sacred space.

is minimizing the electromagnetic fields (EMFs) that affect the body's natural electromagnetic process—especially when EMFs occur in bedrooms. (More information on baubiologie can be found at BuildingBiology.net.)

In a studio apartment, it's difficult to clear EMFs from the sleeping area because the resident lives, works, and rests in one room. I recommended Julie replace her electric clock with a battery-operated one and her cordless phone with an old-fashioned corded one. We moved her TV, computer, cell phone charger, and air filter as far as possible from her bed. She already had a metal-free mattress frame and mattress, which are less likely to pick up and conduct EMFs. And, fortunately, Julie's walls are made from old plaster, so she's relatively well shielded from EMFs outside her apartment building.

Minimizing chemicals

Once we'd created a serene yet energizing environment for Julie, we got down to the basics of a healthy home. I suggested she take a look at some important elements that reduce the number of chemicals in her living space.

- **Shower filter.** The Wellness Shower dechlorinating filter (CutCat.com) removes harmful chemicals from tap water.
- **Humidifier.** During winter it's crucial to humidify dry, overheated city air.

Sensual Design

Good interior design combines the five elements: earth, metal, water, wood, and fire. Using contemplative wisdom to realign clients with the basic forces of nature, I help them think creatively and individually about certain areas of their homes and how they work as a cohesive whole.

A few basic rules apply to most homes.

- Remove clutter to allow optimal energy flow. Sort through and discard personal belongings regularly to prevent energetic build-up and spatial blockages. Minimize knick-knacks; display nothing that's not personally meaningful or beautiful.
- Put things away. Find aesthetically pleasing storage in baskets, on backs of doors, in shelved closets, and in trunks used as tables.
- Use your senses. How does your home smell? Use purifying beeswax candles on a regular basis. How about sound? Choose music that offers natural, relaxing aural therapy. How does your home feel? I like tactile design that mixes fuzzy textures with smooth ones, sleek with rough. Blend organic fluidity with contemporary materials. For example, compose a handmade basket with pinecones or rocks on a glass table. For the bedroom, adding faux goatskin on a smooth silk bedspread accomplishes the concept.

Bacteria- and mold-free humidifiers can be found in the Harmony catalog (Gaiam.com) and the Pure n Natural website (PureNatural.com).

- **Flooring.** I suggested Julie replace her kitchen floor with cork tiles, which absorb sound and look fabulous. Cork is a renewable material (from the bark of cork trees) that's hypoallergenic, durable, fire retardant, easy to maintain, and feels wonderful underfoot (NaturalCork.com).
- **Bedding.** I prefer wool for healthy bedding because it regulates body temperature better than down, yet it retains less moisture. The mattress, mattress pad, comforter, and pillows should all be com-

posed of pure wool or wool mixed with natural latex and organic cotton. I also advised that Julie switch to organic cotton sheets.

- **Towels.** I recommended Julie buy bleach- and dye-free organic cotton towels. Lifekind.com and Rawganique.com offer terrific choices.
- **Cleaning products.** Environmentally friendly kitchen and bath cleaners are readily available at most natural foods stores. Some of my favorites are Seventh Generation (SeventhGeneration.com) and Citri-Glow (MiaRose.com). 🌱

CHERYL TERRACE is president of Vital Design, a Manhattan interior design firm that specializes in beautiful interiors that are environmentally friendly, safe, and natural. She is available for both consultations and complete interior design specifications. Cheryl can be reached at (212) 799-1540. Her website is VitalDesignLtd.com.

Resources

Bedding

Earthsake.com
Gaiam.com
Greensleep.com
Lifekind.com
Miraorganics.com
Nontoxic.com
Rawganique.com
ShepherdsDream.com
SuiteSleep.com

Can Your Home Be Greened?

Send us information on your home and what you'd like to accomplish in it. You could be the lucky recipient of a visit from one of our eco-experts. To submit your home or get more information, contact NaturalHome@NaturalHomeMag.com or write Can This Home Be Greened?, 201 E. Fourth St., Loveland, CO 80537.