ECO HOMES

Being planet-friendly needn't mean compromising on style. Make your home a little greener with our guide to sustainable interiors and eco decorating.
Energy efficiency is a hot issue. Insulation, heat pumps and solar panels may not be the most glamorous things, but there’s no denying that they’re becoming increasingly fashionable, as even those people still unconvinced by the evidence of climate change are alarmed into action by their ever-increasing fuel bills.

This month, the residents of Cambridge will have the chance to explore the realities of eco living and get inspired thanks to Cambridge Carbon Footprint’s Open Eco Homes project. Now in its fifth year, Open Eco Homes (OEH) is a free community event aimed at providing first-hand information about energy-efficient homes. On 14 and 20 September, 18 homes will open their doors to the public.

The majority are older properties which have been retrofitted with pioneering green technology, like the four-storey, multi-occupancy Victorian house on Huntingdon Road that has cut fuel bills from £5,500 per year to £1,780, thanks to the interventions of renewable energy and heating company Cernunnos, one of Open Eco Homes sponsors (see page 36). But there are also two exciting new build homes to view: Madingley Road, with its sedum roof, ground source heat pump...
This home on Madingley Road is one of two new builds on the Open Eco Homes register and hemp and wood fibre insulation and a semi-subterranean terrace on North Street.

"40 per cent of the UK's carbon emissions come from buildings," says Amy Ross, project co-ordinator at Open Eco Homes, "so homeowners can make a big difference by saving money and reducing the energy required to heat their houses. Past visitors to OEH have said that visiting the properties and talking to the owners made them feel better informed about the subject of home energy, more motivated to change their behaviour in simple ways and more knowledgeable about local, suitable products, installers and suppliers." To book visits and for more information about OEH and the five follow-up events, contact 01223 301842; www.openecohomes.org.

Cutting energy consumption is important but it's not the only thing you can do to boost the green credentials of your home.

WOOLANDS WALLPAPER Printed in England with eco friendly inks on paper from sustainably forests. £65 per roll (02086917770; www.tameng.com)

ENG AND WRTH CONDROG F EV 

HARRY'S GARDEN Contemporary bird wallpaper, £48 per roll (07889 465552; www.louisebody.com)
FURNITURE AND LIGHTING

Gone are the days when eco furniture meant compromising on style: today every designer worthy of the name is reusing, renewing and recycling. Rapidly rising star Sebastian Cox (02083 165679; www.sebastiancox.co.uk), for example, creates his beautifully simple, timeless pieces from coppiced hazel and other British hardwoods. “I make well crafted, visually lightweight furniture that you can live with for many years,” Cox says.

“Sustainability is not just about materials, it’s about consuming less.” His latest collection is a highly textured chestnut and ash range for British brand Benchmark (Lath Bench, £690; Lath Chair, £390; Shake Cabinet £2,800 from Benchmark, 01488 608020; www.benchmarkfurniture.com).

Cutting down the amount we consume is the motivation behind the booming interest in upcycling – the art of giving old and discarded pieces a new lease of life. Cambridge café The Urban Shed, with its tables made from wooden cable spools and hessian coffee bean sack curtains, is a brilliant example of what can be achieved with a bit of imagination (01223 324888; www.theurbanshed.com), and skill of course. Anyone with two left thumbs is probably better off buying an already reimagined piece such as one of Zoe Murphy’s re-veneered and gloriously painted cabinets (07780 574314; www.zoemurphy.com). Alternatively, Studio Mama’s Nina Tolstrup has published the making instructions for her witty and ingenious pallet floor light and chairs (www.studiomama.com).

Low-energy lighting has come a long way since the days of slow, faint eco bulbs. LEDs, which are lit by electrons moving about in a semi-conductor, are the most efficient lights on the market, using a tenth of the electricity of a halogen bulb. Online lighting store www.letslighting.com sells a huge range of CE approved LED lights, ranging from the purely functional to the seriously showstopping such as the Marilyn chandelier pictured to the left.

“The use of LED lighting is nothing but beneficial to the consumer,” says company director Benjamin Davis. “You may pay a little more in the first place, but in the long term, they help to reduce utility costs and because they offer such flexibility of colour, they are brilliant aesthetically too.” Davis also suggests that LEDs may have potential health benefits.

“LED lights can assist in providing an optimum amount of light at the right colour temperatures throughout the day to assist in the production of hormones which control the biological clock,” he says.
Decorating with environmentally-friendly products has never been easier.

"Historically, eco paints have been seen as not having a very broad range of colours," says Cathryn Helsby, marketing executive at eco paint specialists Earthborn Paints, "but we're really working on that and we now have 60 colours in the standard range." Their clay-based emulsion is available in some of the new season's most on-trend shades, including the deliciously rich Ruby Red (clay-based emulsion from £31.70 for 2.5 litres, 01926 734171; www.earthbornpaints.co.uk). Auro also stocks an excellent range of natural paints (01452 772020; www.auro.co.uk).

Many wallpaper producers are now making papers from sustainably managed forests.
timber sources (look for FSC certification) and water-based inks. Mother and daughter design studio Miss Print, for example, specialise in environmentally-friendly papers printed with pleasing graphic designs such as Chevron and Kaleidoscope (01277 350581, www.missprint.co.uk).

Little Greene also print all their wallpaper on paper from FSC or PEFC certificated sustainable forests (so for every tree used, four more are planted) using non-toxic inks. They also sell a ready-mixed, solvent-free paste (£18.50 for 2.5kg, 0845 680 2183, www.littlegreene.com).

Eco living: it’s cheaper, healthier, beautiful and utterly contemporary. What’s not to love?
CERNUNNOS

Cambridgeshire already has an impressive reputation as a green region (according to data from the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the county is believed to have more solar panels than anywhere else in the UK) and it is about to be enhanced further by renewable energy specialists Cernunnos at The Barn at Top Farm.

Cernunnos, which is a sponsor of Cambridge Open Eco Homes 2014, was founded by brothers Peter and Andy McKeown in 2011 but this is their first full-scale showroom. "The idea is to show the technology in action," says Peter McKeown. "Most of our clients live in old, rural houses so by moving our showroom into something similar, we are able to show exactly what can be done." The Barn at Top Farm boasts a full range of renewable technologies including solar panels and lighting, biomass systems, heat pumps, smart radiators and thermostats.

Cernunnos has also looked at its waste management and, inspired by the upcycling the brothers saw at The Urban Shed, decided to try and reuse the wooden pallets their stock was delivered on. "We have made them into kitchens and chopped them up to sell as kindling," says Peter. "This showroom is all about inspiring people to find ways to live on less."

The showroom opens to the public on 26 September and, in partnership with Cambridge Carbon Footprint, will be hosting a follow-up workshop on 15 October about how to make serious energy-efficient savings. For more information and to book your place at the launch party, contact 0845 680 2183; www.cernunnos-homes.co.uk.

CASE STUDY: THE GROUNDHOUSE, BRITTANY

As featured on Channel 4's Grand Designs

Local company Kloeber worked with their clients on this impressive eco project in Brittany which had very specific objectives. The plan was to build a fully sustainable eco home which was light, open and invited easy movement throughout the house.

Kloeber's Eurofold timber folding sliding doors were an ideal solution, ticking many boxes of the client's eco requirements. All Kloeber's timber products are FSC certified and have excellent U-value ratings with options of both double and triple glazing with Argon or Krypton gas. The folding doors allow the whole front of the house to be completely opened to the south terrace, enabling a seamless living space in the summer months.

Kloeber's timber Eurofold doors start at around £2000 plus VAT (excluding delivery and fitting).

For further details on Kloeber's full glazing range of set size or bespoke bifold doors in timber or aluminium and complimentary glazing in timber, aluminium or composite, contact 01487 740044; www.kloeber.co.uk.
WHY SEPTEMBER IS THE MONTH TO MAKE YOUR HOME TRULY ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

As residents of the city open up to showcase their eco renovations and Cambridge's first renewable design centre launches, there is no better time to take advantage of what Cambridge Open Eco homes has to offer. As well as our university, Cambridge is becoming more and more associated with its green credentials. Data from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in June of this year showed that we lead the nation in solar installations. Indeed, lowering our environmental impact is something we value. More than a third of Cantabrigians commute to school or work by bike. These achievements are certainly something we should be proud of; however there is a desire to do more. That is, to make buildings lower their carbon footprint further and be cost-effective to run, but where to start? The topic can be a minefield of so-called experts peddling expensive solutions, and eco-bling products for problems that often don't exist. Indeed, the hard sales approach and expense of renewables can lead to a paralysis on what and whom to trust.

Step forward Cambridge Open Eco homes. This is an annual, free, community event when 18 householders open up their homes to the public on 14 and 20 September. Pioneering the latest in renewable technologies and eco renovations, it is an opportunity to see and explore what they did and how they did it, first-hand. In particular there will be the chance to hear their stories and understand the challenges and of course the many benefits and positive impacts switching to renewables has made to their lives.

Highlights of the properties to see are a large Victorian house of multiple occupancy that makes money even when people forget to turn the lights off, and a house built partly underground.

The grand finale will be the relaunch of Top Farm Barn, a Grade II listed barn dating back to the 17th century. Based in a beautiful conservation area, the barn has been transformed into a centre of excellence for renewable energy technology. Completing a fully sustainable retrofit whilst protecting the special heritage features of the barn is a remarkable achievement by Cernunnos - a family-run renewable energy company. The barn will be a functional display base allowing Cernunnos to advise, design, and install renewable technologies for local residents and businesses.

Partnering with Cambridge Carbon Footprint, Cernunnos will also be providing a series of free follow-up practical workshops on what to do next in the journey of making your home truly environmentally friendly.

Visitors can book online via www.openecohomes.org for tours: four a day on Sunday 14 and Saturday 20 September.

RSVP online to book your place at the launch of Cernunnos's new renewable energy centre on Friday 26 or Saturday 27 September www.cernunnos-homes.co.uk/news-reviews/launch-event/