



It's getting easier to be green

City Council launches initiative to encourage more eco-friendly businesses

by amy zimmer / metro new york
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CITY HALL — Hendrickson Custom Cabinetry, which makes high-end cabinets for architects and designers, is trying to be a model of “green” building by using toxic-free finishes and wood that doesn’t use formaldehyde. But barriers remain in convincing buyers to follow suit, according to Lisa Hendrickson, owner of the South Bronx business.

“It’s our job to say we have these kinds of [green] materials around,” Hendrickson said, “but usually architects have already specified what kind of wood finish they want by the time they come to us. They like to do the tried-and-true because they know the end result.”

Another problem comes from the supply end. “Sometimes the availability of the materials is sketchy and people don’t want to wait six to eight weeks for a shipment to come in,” she said.

The City Council, however, is trying to make it easier to go green. It launched an initiative yesterday to make it easier for eco-friendly contractors and architects to connect with local manufacturers of such products as low-toxic carpeting, solar panels and high-efficiency light bulbs.

The demand for eco-friendly building products is expected to grow after January when Local Law 86, which requires buildings with city funding — approximately \$12 billion in construction and renovation over the next 10 years — to incorporate green elements into their design, takes effect. But many potential buyers still don’t know there are local producers, according to a study released yesterday by the New York Industrial Retention Network and the Industrial & Technology Assistance Corporation.

“Manufacturing provides some of the best-paying jobs in the city for people who lack the skills to compete in finance, business services and other sectors,” said Adam Friedman, NYIRN’s executive director. “It’s important that we do everything we can to retain and grow these jobs.”

Mark Righter, founder of Cambium Studio woodworkers, has been incorporating green principles since starting up two years ago.

“It’s becoming easier,” Righter said. “It used to be that going green was a huge extra cost or involved making compromises — green finishes looked horrible or didn’t perform well.”

But the market is growing for locally produced products that are non-toxic. His company uses reclaimed lumber, glass and found objects.

But some of his clients don’t care about keeping materials out of landfills, so his company will create custom work that uses plastics or exotic woods if a customer wants that. “For us, having a client that’s pleased is being green as well because it means the furniture won’t end up on the street.”

Making connections

- According to a study by the New York Industrial Retention Network, which surveyed 53 companies, 87 percent said they would go green if given resources.
- NYIRN is pushing for a tax credit for companies that save energy, use recycled materials or cut waste.
- NYIRN will host mini-trade shows and workshops to increase face-to-face interactions between manufacturers and key buyers and will provide marketing assistance.