

LIVING GREEN The Playroom and Beyond

By Renee Macalino Rutledge

Caring for the environment doesn't begin when you have children. Many parents, like Matthew and Alexandra Wadlund of Oakland, were sincerely involved in environmental issues prior to having their daughter Natasha. The couple met 20 years ago, while working on land conservation. However, Matthew does say that becoming a parent caused the couple to reexamine the way their values and philosophy about the world came into being. He quotes Churchill by saying, "We shape our environment and thereafter it shapes

At the same time, becoming a parent can often be a catalyst for change. Expectant mother Jessica Appelgren of San Francisco says the notion of parenthood directly influences her lifestyle and decision-making.

"I think the idea of another human creating waste and filling landfill space is important to consider when you become a parent," she says. "We need to be responsible for ourselves and also the children we bring into the world, or the problem we are seeing now will continue to multiply."

Parents who go green aren't simply following trends. Instead, they're weighing their options and making smarter choices, ingraining family values that will benefit generations to come. Whether you relate more to the Wadlunds or to Jessica, you're not alone. All signs indicate that parents are more environmentally conscious than ever before. Like most things, it all starts at home.

The House Itself

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, proper air sealing and insulation can dramatically reduce heating and cooling costs and create healthier indoor envi-

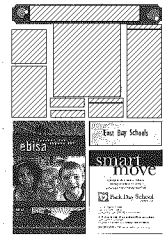
ronments. The Wadlund family had this in mind while completely remodeling their Victorian fixer-upper to create a low-impact home. In addition to installing Energy Star appliances and using natural materials, the Wadlunds upgraded all their windows and added insulation.

Parent and architect Mila Zelkha of Oakland also takes her insulation seriously. "One of the first things I did was to insulate our 1898 home with blown-in cellulose in the walls and ceilings, and Greenguard-certified batting between the floor joists in our basement."

Zelkha, who specializes in design and construction management for green residential projects, says not renovating at all can sometimes be the greenest option. "As a designer, I always ask myself whether there is something I can reuse in my design – or the extent to which a space really needs to be redesigned in the first place."

One place where reuse fits in nicely is materials. For example, companies like Bonfire Glass Tile and Oceanside Glasstile Co. offer glass tile products made from recycled, post-consumer glass that comes directly from used, curbside bottles. In the home, these colorful tiles lend an artisan's touch to backsplashes and countertops.

Sinks and lavatories are now available in recycled aluminum and brass. Cabinets and flooring are available in salvaged wood, which can be remilled to look new or rustic. Even brand-new wood products certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) are eco-friendly because they're sustainably
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farmed as opposed to tapping rapidly shrinking old-growth forests.

Other possibilities include recycled rubber or alternatives like cork, made solely from the bark of trees. Soft under-foot, cork floors are becoming a favorite in the playroom.

Maxine Malberg, who spearheads recycling events in Berkeley and Albany, enjoys her own creative vision of reuse in the backyard. She converted dilapidated concrete hardscaping into a mosaic patio.

"What I had was cracking and really needed repair," Malberg says. "Where most people would haul it away or put a deck in or repour concrete, I decided to do something more earth-friendly. I had it all cracked so that it resembles a mosaic of large thick pieces of existing cement."

Protecting indoor air quality is another big item on the green parent checklist, especially since it can reduce allergies, asthma rates, and other health problems. Zelkha recommends using organic carpeting, since synthetic fibers and padding may contain chemicals that offgas, or evaporate, into the air.

"In the kids' room, I installed an organic wool carpet with recycled cotton rag carpet padding for insulation," she says.

She also recommends low-VOC paints by Yolo® and Benjamin Moore®.

[Editor's note: VOC stands for volatile organic compounds, common indoor air pollutants that were, until recently, essential to paint performance. Most manufacturers now offer one or more varieties of low-VOC or non-VOC paint and wood finishes.]

"When you're ready, there are so many resources and creative options out there to help you address your goals," Zelkha says.

Appelgren opted for non-toxic Mythic® paint for the nursery, and, like Mila Zelkha, she uses organic baby clothes, natural, organic bedding, and cloth diapers.

Changing the Way You Live in the House

While there's a lot you can do to change the house itself toward a more economic, low-impact footprint, green living doesn't end there. Zelkha believes the lifestyle choices we make within the home count most.

"From an architect's perspective, there's a lot you can do with materials and processes to green a space, but from a parent's perspective, it is how you and your children live in the space that has the most impact and potential for health and sustainability," Zelkha says.

That's why the Wadlunds selected a house located close to shopping centers, transportation, entertainment, and friends – they rarely drive.

"We have a fantastic farmer's market close by and go nearly every week," Matthew Wadlund says. "I'm close enough to work to bike most days; Alexandra can BART in."

Wadlund also mentions paying closer attention to smaller, "children's touch" items, all the things his daughter comes in direct contact with.

"We're lucky to be in a little network where Natasha can get a lot of great clothing as "hand-me-downs," and toys, books, and other stuff as "hand-me-rounds,"" he says.

To further reduce consumption, the family saves water with on-demand water

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heating, low-flow fixtures, and a drought-tolerant landscape.

"We put in a vegetable garden and devised a 'micro-orchard' along with flowers for cutting," Wadlund says. "Nearly all our food is organic and 'slow food' or low-processed."

Plastic toys and baby bottles are also absent in the Wadlund household because they can potentially release unwanted chemicals. Needless to say, this combination of tasks has not been easy.

Appelgren has also faced a big challenge when it comes to being selective about toys. Having opted away from

modern baby gadgets that require electricity, she must continually filter out the latest new toys that friends and family give her.

"The key is to tactfully inform the people in your life that you don't want to be part of the too-quick life cycle for these toys," she says. "We are looking into a Netflix-like service where we would rent toys for a certain period of time until our son grows out of them."

Keeping the Cycle Going

If the remodeling process centers on reusing, then the lifestyle that accompanies it revolves around reducing. But how can you keep it all going, or find the right balance of eco-friendly options that work best for you? There's definitely a communal aspect to going green, a sense of being inspired by and because of the people with whom we share our lives and neighborhoods. There's also a personal commitment that's required to make greener choices.

Maxine Malberg, the green mosaic patio owner, no longer lives with her two grown children. The recycled patio was the biggest green project she's had done in her house, and it's something she describes as doing for herself. After all, we teach our children by example, as Malberg learned from her father from a very young age.

"My dad always

impressed upon me how important it is not to litter," she says. "That's inspired me towards working to keep things out of the land-fill."

Mila Zelkha's children, at ages 4 and 1, are a continual source of inspiration.

"As a parent," she says, "I am compelled to give my children a healthy start to their lives."

Simple things like reading, asking lots of questions, getting samples and ideas, and engaging in conversation are all points of advice these green parents give to those they inspire.

Expectant mother Jessica Appelgren says, "I have tried to make good decisions, but as we are yet to be parents, I know a lot of the battle is ahead of me!"

Renee Macalino Rutledge is a Bay Area parent who has written for various local publications. She is currently the senior editor for CalFinder, a Bay Area Green Business that publishes a remodeling blog and online magazine.





Natasha Wadlund picks nectarines in the family's "micro-orchard."

Places to Find Eco-Friendly Home Products

- **ECOHOME IMPROVEMENT**, 2617 & 2619 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley 94702. For ecological and healthy home improvement products. (510) 644-2400. www.ecohomeimprovement.com.
- **VINTAGE ROOF TILE**, 1325 E. Julian Ave., San Jose 95116. For used, salvaged, and recycled clay and concrete roof tiles for renovations, remodeling, and repair. (408) 264-1405. www.vintagerooftiles.us/contact_us.html.
- **AlterECO**, P.O. Box 1206, Sausalito 94966. Offers a showroom of modern bamboo cabinetry. (415) 331-8342. www.bamboocabinets.com.
- **THE WOODEN DUCK**, 2919 Seventh St., Berkeley 94710. Specializing in furniture made from recycled wood. (510) 848-3575. www.thewoodenduck.com/v2/home.html.
- **GREEN FUSION DESIGN CENTER**, 14 Greenfield Ave., San Anselmo 94960. Offers products and services to create healthier residential and commercial environments. (415) 454-0174. www.greenfusion-designcenter.com.
- **FLOORING ALTERNATIVES**, 758 Gilman St., Berkeley 94710. Offers beautiful, durable flooring materials that are healthy for the planet. (510) 550-4449. www.flooringalternatives.com.
- **ECO-TERRIC**, 1812 Polk St., San Francisco 94109. For green and healthy home furnishings and design consultation. (866) 933-1655. www.eco-terric.com.
- **FAIRFAX LUMBER AND HARDWARE**, 109 Broadway, Fairfax 94930. Provides quality, nature-friendly building materials and help. (415) 453-4410. www.fairfaxlumber.com.
- **EARTHSOURCE FOREST PRODUCTS**, 1618 - 28th St., Oakland 94608. For sustainably harvested and reclaimed wood products and new garden furniture. (510) 547-7257. www.earthsourcewood.com.

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Maxine Malberg relaxes on her recycled mosaic patio.