

MODERN GREEN HOMES Sanctuary

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LIVING, KITCHEN + BATHROOM

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Winter escapes
Hydronic heating
Choosing your architect



A good night's sleep



WORDS

Megan Norgate

How do you make your bedroom the most comfortable, restful and healthy room in your house? Interior designer Megan Norgate steps through the basics of good bedroom design and fitout.

IF YOU CONSIDER THE TOTAL AMOUNT of hours we spend in various parts of the home, bedrooms are by far our most frequently inhabited spaces. Good bedroom design contributes to our psychological and physical health and wellbeing, and with careful planning need not be difficult or expensive to achieve.

THE BEST-PLACED BEDROOM

Bedrooms can be spaces for rest, work, storage and play. But for all of their potential uses, they needn't be very large.

The location of bedrooms in your house is crucial. Upstairs bedrooms can be beneficial in cool climates as the home's interior heat will collect on the upper floor. In warmer climates, placing bedrooms to the south and near thermal mass will help keep them cool.

NATURALLY LIT & DRAUGHT FREE

East facing windows are ideal in a bedroom as morning sun and a view out a window from the bed are good for the spirit. Windows that can be locked securely open at night will help to passively ventilate the room and improve indoor air quality. A ceiling fan will circulate air and reduce your need for air-conditioning.

Thermally effective window treatments are especially important in bedrooms. North or west-facing windows will benefit from exterior shading in summer to keep a bedroom cool. Adjustable exterior blinds or deciduous plantings are ideal as they adapt to provide shade as needed. High performance windows with double or triple glazing and/or low-e coatings will also help to stabilise internal temperatures. [Ed note: See our *Sanctuary 24* article on external blinds and shading online for more information on exterior blinds and shading and p75 of this issue for information on edible shading plants. Read more about high-performance windows online.]

To keep bedrooms comfortable in winter, using heavy-lined curtains that have pelmets and run to the floor will effectively trap warm air inside. If curtains are under the window, recess-mounted honeycomb blinds or face-fixed heavy backed roman blinds are the best option. Roman blinds use less material than curtains and so can be a good opportunity to use organic and/or locally-printed fabrics. To further reduce winter draughts and summer heat, seal up old wall vents, fireplaces and other gaps. Insect screens are useful to keep mosquitoes and other bugs at bay.

LAYOUT AND FITOUT

Preserve limited floor space by running storage cupboards above head height and tuck a bed or desk into the alcove

underneath. Capitalise on high ceilings by creating a sleeping loft, utilising the space underneath to fit a wardrobe, desk or another bed. Locating the bed so you are not looking out the doorway or directly out windows onto the street will increase your sense of privacy.

Wardrobes are a cost-intensive part of a renovation, so rather than using mass-produced storage solutions, look for creative ways to reuse secondhand cabinets, or hide shelves and racks behind a lightweight ceiling-mounted curtain.

Keeping furnishings simple will reduce dust build up, which can contribute to allergies and respiratory problems. Rugs are a warm and soft alternative to carpet that can be aired and cleaned regularly. Leave new upholstery or furniture outside to off-gas for a few days to get rid of the 'factory fresh' smell. Slatted bed bases provide good ventilation around a mattress that helps to reduce the occurrence of mould and dust mites.

Mattresses are commonly constructed and treated with chemicals that contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as antibacterial agents, flame-retardants, PVCs, bleaches, pesticides and dyes. These chemicals can contribute to allergies, respiratory problems and chemical sensitivities. Mattresses made of plant-based materials such as organic wool, cotton, hemp, natural latex and bamboo are an alternative option. Bamboo and latex are naturally hypoallergenic and dust mite resistant. If you are replacing a mattress



This master bedroom is free of toxins. A latex mattress and indigo dyed linen sheets are paired with a simple mid-century bedhead, lamps and ceramics. All images Megan Norgate



● This child's room was dark during the day so a double-glazed north-facing high-level window was installed to make it a pleasant place to play during the day. A heavy-backed roman blind in hand-printed linen helps regulate the temperature. Vintage furniture, toys, cushions and bedspreads decorate the space.

divert it from landfill by sending it for recycling.

Ideally, use natural fibre bed linens and covers made from organic and ethically produced sources of bamboo, linen, silk or cotton. Wash and line dry new bedding before using it to get rid of any chemical residues from production, or buy secondhand blankets. Try dyeing old or secondhand bedding and blankets to give them a new lease of life.

Also keep in mind that many painted surfaces and composite timber products off-gas VOCs into your indoor environment so choose VOC-free paints and oils for your bedroom walls and furniture, and EO rated timbers (products that have a formaldehyde emissions limit $\leq 0.041\text{ppm}$) for your cabinetry [Ed note: See articles on paint, VOCs and blinds in back issues of *Sanctuary*].

If you are concerned about exposure to electromagnetic radiation, keep digital

clocks, radios, baby monitors and phone chargers away from where you are sleeping and avoid positioning a bed on the other side of a wall to a smart meter, refrigerator or other appliance. [Ed note: The World Health Organisation states that current evidence does not confirm the existence of any health consequences from exposure to low-level electromagnetic fields, but says gaps in knowledge about biological effects exist and need further research. See www.who.int/peh-erf/en/ for more information.]

Poorly designed and furnished bedrooms can affect our wellbeing and ability to get a good night's sleep. By applying a few simple design and retrofitting ideas and carefully selecting the materials we bring inside our bedrooms, we can create healthy and restful spaces that are not only a place to sleep, but a retreat in which we can relax and rejuvenate. ●

MATTRESS RECYCLING

An average mattress contains 12.5 kg of steel, 2 kg of wood and 1.5 kg of foam. Rather than leaving your mattress for landfill, get one of the many mattress recycling companies in major cities to collect your mattress and recycle it. Better yet are local social enterprises and recycling schemes, such as Mission Australia's Soft Landing, that recycle (and sometimes refurbish) mattresses and provide traineeships for local residents.

Megan Norgate is an interior designer, permaculture designer and sustainability consultant based in Melbourne. As principle of design firm Brave New Eco, Megan works in collaboration with various building designers, permaculturists and craftspeople. <http://braveneweco.com.au>