

SANTA FE

# TREND

WHERE ART, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN MEET  
YOUR SOURCE FOR LIVING WELL

SUMMER/FALL 2003 VOLUME 4 ISSUE 1

## NEW OLD SANTA FE STYLE

HOW ADOBE BECAME COOL

## THE FORMIDABLE FORMANS

A MODERNIST AFFAIR WITH LASTING IMPRESSIONS

## GET WATER-WISE

SANTA FEANS CONSERVE BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

## HOME RETREATS

EXPERT TIPS FOR CREATING  
A STRESS-FREE ZONE

## CULINARY ARTISTRY

CHIPOTLE, DARK CHOCOLATE &  
CABERNET





## PROFILE / Casa Natura

Good health starts at home—with eco-friendly furnishings and building materials

### STEPPING INTO CASA NATURA

from Santa Fe's busy Marcy Street, you enter a feel-good sanctuary scented with sublime aromas and soothing music. As the name partly suggests, Casa Natura's mission is to provide healthy, natural decorating choices that are also beautiful and luxurious. The space easily persuades one to leave behind mass-produced and chemically processed décor and furnishings. Its pale honey floors of sustainably harvested bamboo and walls deliciously caramelized with a plant-based paint show that living without chemicals can be elegant and refreshingly different.

"I want to break the stereotype that natural things are ugly," says Casa Natura's owner Daryl Stanton. "It's not all beige and off-white,"

# Making Wholesome Homes

she asserts, showing off some favorites: sinuously light hemp-silk sheets, naturally dyed chenille bedspreads, and lampshades and window coverings made locally from hand-pressed paper interwoven with leaves, flowers, and feathers.

Stanton's *raison d'être* is eye-opening. When she redecorated her Los Angeles home over two decades ago, she immediately became very ill. "We all have different thresholds," she says, musing on toxic polyester fibers and polyurethane floor varnishes that she had been exposed to. Other examples of unhealthy home decorating include plywood and particleboard, petroleum or chemical-based paints and sealers, and synthetic carpeting, upholstery fabrics, and cushioning.

Back then "chemical sensitivities" and "environmental illness," also known as "sick-building syndrome," had not yet entered the vernacular. Little was known about how build-



BY JENNIFER LOWE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENDA KELLEY

Daryl Stanton smooths bedding over the best-selling Samina sleep system.



ing materials and furnishings can affect our health. Today, even the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency, [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)) admits indoor air can sometimes be more polluted than outdoor air.

Stanton's experiences with environmental illness motivated her to build a network of suppliers who provide natural decorating materials, and she soon found herself in business. Her first endeavor, called Healthy Interiors, was an interior design agency, which has evolved into Casa Natura.

Stanton seeks out companies whose products are grown, processed, and manufactured so that workers and neighbors—"the people who live downwind"—are not harmed by the industry. She also scouts out products by women's and community cooperatives.

"I don't focus solely on whether the product is healthy for the consumer," she says. "I'm also interested in whether it's healthy for everyone involved in its production."

Consider the popular line of Crispina—hand-sewn blankets stitched from recycled wool and denim, made in Housatonic, Massachusetts. Or sheets made from organic cotton, which are not processed with formaldehyde, as are regular sheets. Soft organic cotton blankets are other items in demand.



A shopper browses at Casa Natura.

Many of Stanton's customers treat themselves to homegrown spas. Beauty products sell well, such as a scented sugar rub made from babassu oil, extracted from small South American coconuts harvested and processed by indigenous women. Other products are made by local craftspeople using essential oils, like those in the Claire line.

Soy and beeswax cotton-wicked candles also see brisk sales. Stanton explains that regular candles containing leaded wicks pollute

indoor air; her customers enjoy cleaner air by burning cotton-wicked candles and votives instead, and many can sniff a subtly purer difference in the room.

For the overwhelmed redecorator, Stanton suggests starting with the bedroom, beginning with replacing baby's furniture because infants are especially vulnerable to chemicals. Casa Natura carries sustainably harvested wooden cribs, natural fiber mattresses, and bedding and clothing hand-woven from flax and other baby-



Soft organic sheets and natural baby products.



*"People are making the connection between chemical exposure and diseases like childhood allergies, asthma, chronic headaches, fibromyalgia, and cancer, which have been rising since the widespread use of chemicals for convenience."*





Natural flooring products.

friendly fabrics. She even has organic Egyptian cotton dolls safe for little mouths.

Stanton pauses longest over the Samina sleep system, made from scientifically calibrated layers of organic merino wool, natural latex from rubber trees, and pliable ash wood slats. In his quest for the perfect night's shut-eye, Austrian Guenther Amann designed the system based on the principles of *baubiologie*, a German lifestyle concept integrating human and environmental factors.

"We spend a third of our lives sleeping," notes Stanton. "If I had to replace one thing in my home, it would be the mattress." Even at \$2,000 for a twin on up to \$6,000 for a king, this mattress is the store's bestseller.

Acknowledging that natural and environmentally friendly products cost more, Stanton sighs, "There's no demand yet—but these issues are gradually becoming mainstream."

"People are making the connection between chemical exposure and diseases like childhood allergies, asthma, chronic headaches, fibromyalgia, and cancer, which have been rising since the widespread use of chemicals for convenience. No one needs symptoms of illness to decide they don't want to live with toxins. Using natural materials means you'll save money because you won't have as many sick days or to pay as much in health care costs. It's all about prioritizing," advises Stanton.

For those unsure of how natural materials could fit into their homes, she offers personalized consultations. When asked about natural alternatives to paint, for instance, Stanton bristles, "Of course there are choices! People just don't know about them. There are beautiful selections of plant-based paints and oil-based sealers." (See sidebar.)

Stanton's vision is about shifting our sense of aesthetics and what we consider luxurious. "We tend to think in terms of what's easiest and most convenient. Although it requires more thought to decorate naturally, it's worth it," she declares.

And how is her health now? "I'm great!" Stanton laughs, throwing back her long, lustrous hair. "I'm still quite sensitive, but I simply avoid being exposed to chemicals as much as possible." With the elegant options she keeps discovering, a chemical-free life is becoming more accessible to everyone. ☉

*Jennifer Lowe is a Santa Fe-based freelance writer.*