

## Homes & Real Estate

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### Seek out sustainable furniture by learning its backstory

From climate change to resource conservation to personal health, our choices of furniture — and all products, for that matter — can make a difference.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

#### **Ecoconsumer**

Our furniture just sits there. But every piece has a history — even the least-expensive, mass-produced furniture.

We need to consider the backstory of our furniture, and put environmental impacts on par with other purchasing criteria, such as cost and what it looks like.

From climate change to resource conservation to personal health, our choices of furniture — and all products, for that matter — can make a difference.

Let's focus on sustainable furniture made locally and regionally for the home. Production of furniture in our region reduces impacts from transportation, provides more accountability for consumers and boosts economic development.

#### ***Ways to sustain***

Besides where it's made, sustainability shows up in furniture in various ways.

The materials used can include salvaged timber, remnants of old furniture, or recycled metal. Sustainable furniture also often uses adhesives, finishes and fabrics that contain fewer sketchy chemicals than in mass-produced furniture.

In addition, furniture may be made with sustainably harvested wood, such as lumber certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. Upholstered furniture might include greener fabrics, such as organic cotton, wool, recycled polyester and hemp.

Sustainability involves more than just materials, and you don't always need to buy a new product. Refurbishing, refinishing and reupholstering greatly extend the lives of furniture pieces. For a rewarding feeling of accomplishment and pride, take a class or watch online videos on furniture reupholstering or refinishing, and do it yourself.

Manufacturers can significantly crank up the sustainability quotient of their furniture simply by making it more durable. Furniture that is built to last, such as that dresser passed down from your grandparents, acknowledges climate change by reducing consumption.

Furniture produced in the Northwest is typically pricey, mostly because of the time and labor put into material sourcing and production. As an alternative, you could seek out regionally made used

pieces at consignment stores, for example.

But splurging on a high-quality couch or centerpiece table pays off in the long run, since it may last as long as three cheaper pieces, and holds its resale value better.

Dozens of businesses and craftspeople make furniture in Western Washington.

Some local retailers, including Don Willis Furniture ([donwillisfurniture.com](http://donwillisfurniture.com)) in Seattle and Kent and NuBe Green ([nubegreen.com](http://nubegreen.com)) in Seattle, offer pieces from several of those manufacturers. Many regional furniture makers primarily produce custom or preordered pieces.

### ***A mix of makers***

Although this only scratches the surface (of the subject, not the furniture), check out just a few examples of innovative regional furniture manufacturers and their sustainable practices:

Elpis & Wood ([elpisandwood.com](http://elpisandwood.com)): The Everett-based company makes rustic, “live edge” tables and benches, mostly from Pacific Northwest trees that are milled into slabs and dried.

McKinnon Furniture ([mckinnonfurniture.com](http://mckinnonfurniture.com)): From its wood shop in South Seattle, the retailer produces a variety of pieces — including beds, dressers and bookcases — using hardwoods from replenishable, non-endangered sources

Peter Loh Studio Furniture ([peterloh.com](http://peterloh.com)): The Bellevue firm crafts contemporary living-room furniture designed to last for generations.

EcoBalanza ([ecobalanza.com](http://ecobalanza.com)): Formerly known as Greener Lifestyles, the Seattle-based designer and maker of upholstered furniture uses organic fabrics, FSC-certified wood and solvent-free adhesives.

Codor Design ([codordesign.com](http://codordesign.com)): The project by Seattle duo Tamara Codor and Sterling Voss produces tables, chairs and credenzas utilizing sustainable materials, including brass and salvaged wood.

Rocky Butte ([rockybuttefurniture.com](http://rockybuttefurniture.com)): The Portland company makes bedroom furniture from pine, maple and bamboo, employing methods designed for durability such as “dovetail drawer box” and “pocket hole” construction. They use a water-based, made-in-the-U. S. finish.

Chadhaus ([chadhaus.com](http://chadhaus.com)): Led by husband-and-wife team Chad and Emily Robertson, the Seattle company produces tables, chairs and beds from sustainably harvested Pacific Northwest woods and recycled steel.

In this age of globalization and mass production, local entrepreneurial creativity still thrives. Let’s support it — and sit on it, and eat on it, and put our socks in it — whenever we can.

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