

ABOVE

MAGAZINE

FOR THE EARTH

RICHARD
BRANSON
declares war on
GLOBAL
WARMING

ISABELLA ROSSELLINI
Lessons in seduction

LAUREN BUSH
Secret Garden

KATHLEEN KENNEDY
Born to make things better

LILY COLE
and the wolves

ZAO WOU-KI
The nature of art

ECOSEXUAL
REVOLUTION
by Stefanie Iris Weiss

WHY WE NEED BEES
by Summer Rayne Oakes

BOULDER, COLORADO
A day in eco-paradise

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£5 \$10
ISSN 1747932





HOLLYWOOD REVIVAL

— **KARI WHITMAN** gives fittings and furnishings a second life in the homes of her celebrity clients.

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Kari Whitman is finishing work on the home of a Middle Eastern prince, up in the Hollywood Hills. “I’m not even sure that he knows,” she reveals, “but his whole house is Green, full of reclaimed furniture, fabrics and materials.”

Over the past ten years Whitman has gone from a standing start to being one of America’s best-known designers, blazing a trail for ecologically conscious and environmentally sound design that emphasises low-impact materials and recycled furnishings. Her celebrity clients include Jessica Alba, Kristen Bell, Christina Aguilera, Don Henley, Don Johnson, Emilio Estevez and his father Martin Sheen.

“When we were finishing Jessica’s house we were taking crappy-looking pieces of furniture and reupholstering and refinishing

them, and they ended up looking amazing,” Whitman says, slumping onto an antique sofa in the sprawling West Hollywood apartment that functions as her office. “That’s the biggest and best contribution you can make to a Green lifestyle, just recycling and re-using something that’s already been produced.”

Before moving into design, Whitman spent the best part of a decade as a model and TV actress. “My last acting job was *NYPD Blue* and I just hated it, so I called my agent and said, ‘Throw away all my headshots and stuff. I don’t wanna do this anymore.’ That was in 1999. Emilio Estevez, who’d given me my first acting job, also gave me my first design job. I got some press on Emilio’s house, did Don Henley’s house, and it kind of snowballed from there.”

Whitman calls her design attitude

“eclectic expressionism” though she’s reluctant to characterise her work. Each job brings a different challenge, she says, and so each project will have a distinct character. The paints Whitman uses are strictly non-VOC, water-based and low odour, safe even in nurseries. The fabrics and furnishings she sources are usually fair trade and organic – or sometimes recycled or found at the back of obscure warehouses – while she scours flea markets, Craigslist and even swap meets to find vintage light fixtures, fittings, furniture, and even artwork.

A deeply committed animal activist, Whitman’s ecological ethos also extends to her dog rescue project, Ace of Hearts – named in memory of her American bulldog, Ace. The profits from the “eco-friendly dog beds” she sells through her company, Greener Pup, go to rescuing dogs and finding them homes. ○

www.greenerpup.com