

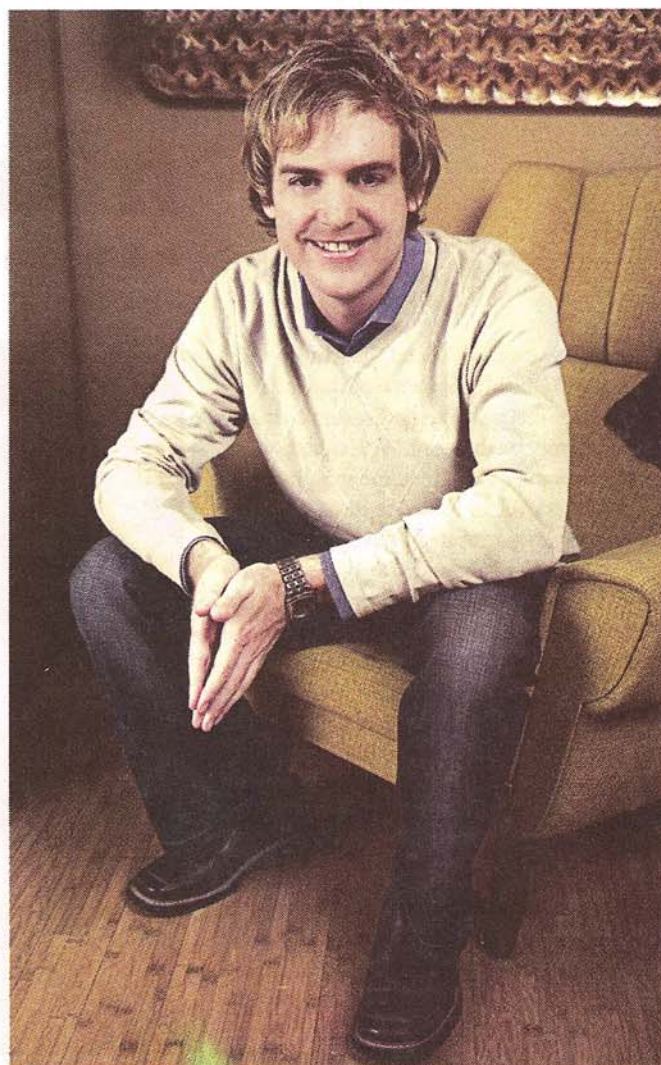
Christopher Kennedy Lean Green Design Machine

BY BLAKE M. SMITH

Christopher Kennedy's office on Palm Canyon Drive feels like home. Part showroom, part design studio, it's an ultra-cool space where you feel like snuggling up on the piles of plush, colorful pillows and gazing up at the handsome horse bookends. It's a designer's paradise.

Swatches of fabric, squares of flooring, and brilliant paint samples spill out from cubbies and cover the workspaces in a symphony of color, style and design. But surprisingly, nearly everything in the room is eco-friendly, sustainable and downright good for you and the planet.

Now, you might think that green interior design is all about hemp drapes and monotone



fabrics. Not so much. Kennedy's arsenal of chic products has you covered from floor to ceiling, and even ventures outside to include cutting-edge, never-water faux grass.

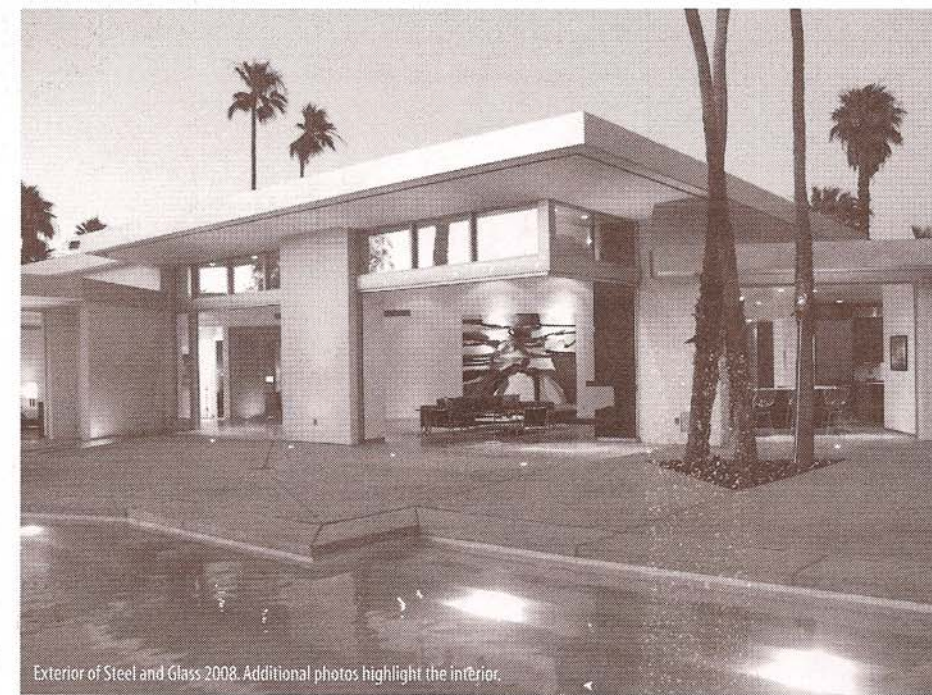
Everywhere you look these days, from proms and weddings to light bulbs, cosmetics, hybrids and even your cell phone, 'green' products are popping up like desert wildflowers after a good soaking. But Kennedy isn't 'green-washing' his design services. His passion for working with the latest green extras and design elements runs deep. When he completes his Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification later this month, he'll be the only LEED Accredited Professional in Interior Design in Palm Springs. It's a grueling exam that requires months of preparation, and as of January 2008, fewer than 50,000 professionals across the country have passed it.

"I think it's great that local designers like Christopher Kennedy are taking the initiative to help create a sustainable community," says Palm Springs Mayor Steve Pougnet. "The more LEED-accredited professionals we have in the valley, the closer we get to realizing the vision of Palm Springs as a 'green' leader and a model community. We're doing everything we can at the city level with efforts like the "Palm Springs Path to a Sustainable Community" and the Sustainable Community Summit coming up in November, but we need citizens like Christopher to make it all happen."

Kennedy is a soft-spoken, clean-cut guy with an inherent Nate Berkus star quality. Part *Queer Eye*, part Willy Wonka, you can tell he's more aware of his surroundings than most of us.

"I like working with people that have a strong sense of personal style, but look to me to take it to the next level and expand upon their ideas," he says. "I believe that designing a home should be a joy—a chance to dream; a rare occasion to express your creativity through color, texture, light and space."

Kennedy was born in San Francisco and grew up on California's Central Coast. He's always had a penchant for all things design. "My parents probably knew that I was going to be an interior designer when I was drawing floor plans, houses and rooms as a child," he says. "I was very involved in the decorating of my room as a kid, and I was constantly drawing and designing. So it was no surprise to my mom and dad when I pursued a degree in architec-



Exterior of Steel and Glass 2008. Additional photos highlight the interior.



ture from Drury University, which eventually led to specializing in interior design."

He founded Christopher Kennedy Design in 2004, after moving to Palm Springs from Los Angeles, and since then his business has grown to include projects in and around the Coachella Valley, Beverly Hills, San Diego, Chicago and Las

Vegas, but he's glad to call Palm Springs home.

"Every day when I wake up, I look at the mountain and I'm so thankful to be here," says Kennedy. "I travel a lot for projects, but I love coming back to the desert. Of course, the history of architecture and design in Palm Springs is monumental, especially for modernism.

Christopher's Top Green Picks

ZERO VOC PAINT

The most eco-friendly paints on the market have no Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), which can off-gas and fill the living room with chemicals. The lower the VOC count, the better. Zero-VOC paints are not only human-friendly, but they come in flat, satin, and fabulous semi-gloss.

ALTERNATIVE FLOORING

I love the look of wood floors, but I don't like to cut down decades-old trees for the sake of style. I chose bamboo floors for my own home. Bamboo is actually a fast-growing, rapidly-renewable plant, so it is an eco-friendly choice that looks great in both modern and traditional interiors. I also like cork floors because they are different, durable and soft underfoot.

RECYCLED GLASS TILES

Those colorful glass bottles that you put in your recycle bin are actually being made into tiles for your floors or bathroom walls. Several companies make beautiful lines of terrazzo tiles that are made from 100 percent recycled glass.

SOY CANDLES

I love burning candles, but most normal are made from petroleum and have lead wicks. I offer a great line of candles in my studio that are made from clean-burning soy with a linen wick. They come in amazing scents like Pomegranate Sage, Egyptian Cotton and Spearmint Grapefruit. My favorite is the Ginger Mango.

FAUX GRASS

I have been having so much with faux grass lately! It is eco-friendly in two regards. First, it is made in part from recycled car tires. Also, it requires no watering or maintenance. I recently used the faux grass on a balcony at Biltmore Condo colony. My clients never used the space before ... now feels like a cool rooftop deck at a W Hotel!



never cold. Refined but not stuffy. Each project is so different—my goal is always to bring out each client's personal style, and then create a home that is 100 percent unique to them. That approach keeps my work fresh and interesting."

And his approach is getting noticed. Kennedy recently entered *Architectural Digest's* Open Audition competition that was held in West Hollywood last March. More than 400 established and up-and-coming designers showcased their projects. He placed in the top 22 from California and his designs were chosen to appear in the print edition of the magazine.

Kennedy's entry was his design of the furnishings and fabrics for architect Brian Buchan and his partner Jaime Rook's new modern masterpiece—Steel and Glass 2007. Fast becoming a desert classic, the house has been the site of numerous photo shoots, private parties and reality TV shows. Now, Buchan and Rook have teamed up again to create the latest edition of the series—Steel and Glass 2008.

"Having worked with Christopher on Steel and Glass 2007, we definitely wanted him back to bring his hip, green sensibility to the property," says Buchan. "I build green because that's how it should be built, so it was important to us to have the interiors be as environmentally responsible as possible too."

Steel and Glass 2008 integrates many of the green building standards and concepts that projects must meet to be LEED-certified. The house was built with its heating and air conditioning systems underground, and hot water is heated instantly so there's no tank to keep hot. The eight-inch thick polished concrete floors keep heat in during winter and cool off the house throughout the summer. Doubly-insulated steel walls help keep energy costs low, with the potential of saving thousands per month. Outside, low-flow drip systems irrigate the water-resistant desert landscaping, and the bright patches of manicured lawn are actually made of plastic that comes with a 20-year guarantee. That's two decades of no watering. Can't beat that.

With stunning views of the mountains, the 3,700-square-foot Steel and Glass 2008 house in the Ruth Hardy Park neighborhood of Palm Springs is sure to become another local landmark. The new house debuted last month when they hosted more than 400 guests for the Equality California Awards kick-off event.

The main house has that indoor/outdoor Palm Springs lifestyle feel and nearly all of its retractable Fleetwood windows face the mountains. Pylons sunk 16 feet into the ground brace the house against earthquakes and wind, while opening up space to allow for more windows and towering ceilings.

"In many ways, the striking architecture was a challenge," says Kennedy. "When the architecture of a house is as strong as that of Steel and Glass 2008, the question is: How do you complement the home and enhance it, but not compete with it? Bringing warmth and intimate scale to such soaring, expansive spaces was a top priority for me."

And by all accounts, he's achieved it. With projects like Steel and Glass 2008 and his recent design accolades, Christopher Kennedy is on the high road to 'greening' up the desert with a message that is good for all of us:

"Green design is beautiful and not hard to implement. You don't have to sacrifice style to do something good for your health and the health of the planet."

There's a real appreciation for it here, so it's a wonderful place to be in the design field."

Like the original modernism movement of the 19th and 20th centuries, the so-called 'new modernism' still embraces industry and celebrates man's achievement over nature, but doesn't forsake our heritage or humanity. While

some describe the modernist aesthetic as soulless and mechanistic, Kennedy brings a homeyness to his smart, fashion-forward designs within the concrete and steel.

"I think that I am best known for a warm, comfortable modernism. My spaces have been described as casually sophisticated," he explains. "Modern but