

# Keen on green

Interior designer Jessica Helgerson's clean, sustainable designs receive rave reviews

By REBECCA RAGAIN  
for *The Tribune's*  
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After Jessica Helgerson graduated from school in California, she worked for interior design firms that specialized in luxury houses in large-scale planned communities.

But Helgerson's interests tended more toward eco-friendly design.

As a volunteer with a nonprofit organization called The Sustainability Project, Helgerson was tuned into the concept of creating sustainable environments — a practice that she wanted to bring to her design work.

But "no one was doing what I wanted to do there," she says.

So, 10 years ago Helgerson started Jessica Helgerson Interior Design (723 N.W. 18th Ave., 503-548-4984, [www.jhinteriordesign.com](http://www.jhinteriordesign.com)) a company with sustainability as its mission. It turned out that the niche was just waiting to be filled.

"It was amazing how quickly I got a response," she says. "I had a lot of business."

Helgerson is still plenty busy today, now that she lives and works in Portland. Typically, she has between seven and 10 design projects under way, in different phases of development.

Helgerson has designed spaces for commercial clients, such as Andina Restaurant, although residential remodeling projects are more common.

In fact, remodeling Portland's older homes is becoming Helgerson's specialty.

For example, she is currently working with a former editor of *Dwell* magazine, Amara Holstein, to remodel Holstein's turn-of-the-century house, which the editor shares with husband Mark Deggeler.

Helgerson's preference when dealing with these older homes is to stay true to period with



COURTESY OF LINCOLN BARBOUR

Jessica Helgerson specializes in eco-friendly interior design for older homes. Her preference is to stay true to the period of the home with permanent fixtures such as case-work, then to spice things up with modern furniture and lighting.

permanent fixtures such as casework, cabinets and built-ins. And then she likes to spice up the spaces with modern furniture and lighting.

"I like that eclectic blend of periods," she says.

Helgerson believes that keeping contemporary styles confined to easily replaceable items

is a more environmentally conscious route — a belief no doubt seconded by anyone who has pitched to tear out a serviceable but displeasing 1970s kitchen.

"If we remodel the inside of

these houses in a super 2009-way, with trendy materials, in another five years (the homeowner) will want to remodel so it's 2014," Helgerson says.

On the other hand, she says, "If a midcentury house has a really good midcentury feel, done well and true to period, I'm hoping the next couple won't want to remodel again."

Other green aspects of Helgerson's design process include specifying that, during remodeling projects, contractors salvage materials that can be re-used.

In addition, any new lumber must be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, meaning that the forest from which the

timber was harvested is managed in a sustainable manner.

Although some clients come to Helgerson because of her familiarity with green design, they also are attracted to her design aesthetic. Helgerson's work has been featured in *Architectural Digest*, *House Beautiful* and *Better Homes and Gardens* magazines.

Helgerson's favorite projects are those for clients who are themselves design-savvy, like Holstein.

"It's more fun for me when ... they kind of know what they want because it pushes me to do something different than what I would have done," Helgerson says. "It's fun to have the client push it in a fresh direction."