

AIRSTREAM SUSTAINABILITY • ALUMAPALOOZA PEOPLE • BUZZ BUS



AIRSTREAM

Life

Online Edition

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This 1978 Airstream gets grins from Golden era travelers who recall crisscrossing the country from Mount Rushmore to Plymouth Rock in family station wagons pulling a trailer. Today the remodeled Airstream is the home, office and front door to the great outdoors for 27 year old architect Matthew Hofman.

Why did he remodel a 150 square foot trailer in his spare time while designing million-dollar villas by day? "I'm at a point in my life where I am trying to live with less," says Hofman, who parked the Airstream on the site of a Montecito home that burned down in the "Tea Fire" of November 2008. Moving has a way of making one consider the value of possessions, and Hofman opted to live with less and enjoy his new space more.

The quest for inner peace began with finding the Airstream on Craigslist. He rescued the abandoned treasure from behind a chain link fence guarded by a pit bull. The body was solid, but the interior



By JOOY BROTHERSTON, ASID

AIRSTREAM SUSTAINABILITY

Light color values create the impression of a much larger space in this sustainably renovated Airstream. **INSET:** A complete gutting of the interior and evaluation of the materials was an essential first step. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** A Häfele Kesselöfener pullout pantry system is one of the owner's favorite features, much like the ones included in some current model Airstream floorplans.





was a mess. As many other Airstream renovators have discovered, it was an ideal platform for designing a more environmentally sustainable home.

"Sustainability" and "green building design" are terms that have been tossed around a lot. But what is sustainability? Hofmann defines it as, "Designing something for life, and creating the capacity to endure," with all the materials selected.

Airstream-based sustainability begins with the knowledge that the buildings we create are the greatest single consumers of energy and natural resources in the United States today. Re-using an existing structure, even one as small as an Airstream, eliminates the large amount of energy and natural resources needed to build new. Hofman's Airstream project is, at its heart, an exercise in reusing an existing space.

The design process began by taking away what was distracting and unnecessary, and creating a design with the least amount of elements. The trailer was first gutted and cleaned. Because a trailer by its nature is a small confined space, a primary design goal was

to open up the space by removing unnecessary visual obstacles. In the Airstream, several walls were removed, and an oak table that was beyond repair was also removed.

Re-use of materials inside the Airstream also helped the sustainability quotient. Much of the existing cabinetry was saved and reused. (The gaucho bed was beyond saving, but the new convertible couch looks like a fine piece of furniture.) The overhead

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ABOVE: The kitchen features bamboo countertops, Moen sink and spray faucet, Alwood Wedgewood stainless steel cook top, Norcold refrigerator, and glass tile backsplash. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The dinette does double duty as an office, with an iMac computer on a swivel arm and a dedicated printer drawer.

cabinetry was removed, modified, and re-installed for a more pleasing alignment. All of the overhead cabinetry hardware was saved and reused, including the tambour rollup doors, plastic tracks, and metal pulls. The front dinette set is original, merely refinished and painted.

Another key element of the project was reclamation of existing materials. While some elements may not be used for their original intended purpose, such as the storage drawers beneath the gaucho, by removing and reconditioning as necessary they can ultimately be transferred to a new use in the same project. In this case, the storage drawers made a beautiful base for the new bed. The walls and oak table were reclaimed as shelving in the cabinetry.

In all projects there are elements that cannot be reused or reclaimed. Instead of sending these items to the landfill, they can be recycled. Many materials from the Airstream were stockpiled and sent to a recycling yard, such as hardware, braces, tracks, rods, and plastic paneling. All of the old appliances (refrigerator, oven, sink, and toilet) were either sold on Craigslist or donated to a new user, thus enabling them to continue their lifespan in a different use, and eliminating the need for a new unit to be built.

Sustainability calls for placing a high priority on using regional materials and suppliers. The "embodied energy" of a material or product is how much energy is required to get a specific product from its natural state to final installation. There are many factors that contribute to embodied energy, one of which is shipping. It takes more energy (and hence produces more pollution) to get a product from China than it does to get a product supplied locally. One focus on the Airstream project was to use regional material and

suppliers. An example is the bamboo flooring produced by "Cali Bamboo," used for all flooring, countertops and table. This supplier is less than one hundred miles away.

Paints and finishes can release low-level toxic emissions into the air for years after application. The source of these toxins is a variety of volatile organic compounds (VOC) which until recently, were essential to the performance of the paint. New environmental regulations and consumer demand have led to low-VOC and zero-VOC paints and finishes. Using low-VOC paint is especially important in a small space such as a trailer, and it is safer for both your health and the environment.

Additionally, an often overlooked aspect of sustainability is to select paints and finishes that are made from natural raw ingredients such as water, plant oils and resins, plant dyes and essential oils. There are also many natural minerals such as clay, chalk and talcum, milk casein, natural latex, bees' wax, earth and mineral dyes that can be used in the finishing process. Water-based natural paints give off almost no smell. The oil-based natural paints usually have a pleasant fragrance of citrus or essential oils. Allergies and sensitivities to these paints are not common.

The paint used in this project is Sherwin Williams Harmony zero-VOC Interior Acrylic Latex, in Extra White color. The surface was first sanded and prepped using Harmony primer, then a semi-gloss top coat was applied.

Sustainably grown materials are those natural materials that take less time to grow, and may be replanted and grown again such as bamboo. Bamboo is one of the fastest growing plants on earth

and typically takes just 5 to 7 years to mature, making it a good choice relative to hardwoods such as oak that take from 20 to 50 years to mature.

Hofmann is clearly comfortable with his sustainable home-office interior design. Heating is accomplished with an integrated propane heating system. Ample cross ventilation provides cooling thanks to southern California's sea breeze. He also uses the exterior awnings on each side to shade the open windows.

The electrical system utilizes a typical 12-volt battery system with integrated charger, and a solar panel battery charging system is currently being installed. Fluorescent and halogen lights are utilized throughout the interior.

The re-designed interior now has a feeling of a large space, with light color values used on all the surfaces. The Magritte print, from a 1964 painting titled "Son of Man," at the entry is a welcoming piece into this architect's home and office. The dinette cushions were hand sewn using Sunbrella indoor-outdoor fabric, and the table top was replaced using Cali Bamboo natural strand bamboo. This area also serves as a workspace and media lounge. The 27" iMac can be used to watch movies or draw design plans. The office printer is tucked into a custom-built pullout drawer under the bench seat.



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***INSET:** Before renovation this Airstream looked like any other neglected trailer, but the value of the durable aluminum shell inspired Halbur to make it into a showpiece. **BELOW:** A glass vessel sink, bamboo countertop, Grohe faucet, and glass tile completely changed the appearance and sustainability quotient.*



The galley has a Moen stainless steel sink with a Euro-modern chrome 23-inch pull out spray faucet. The other new appliances include an Atwood Wedgewood stainless steel three-burner propane gas cook top, a Norcold refrigerator, and a countertop stainless steel toaster oven. One of Hofmann's favorite items is the Häfele Kesseböhmer pullout pantry system. Häfele also makes a very slick Moovit drawer box system with cutlery inserts in addition to the overhead cabinets. These German designs add some shipping mileage to the sustainability equation, but they are unbeatable!

The bathroom was Hofmann's greatest indulgence. Traditional small glass tile is installed over a porous flexible foam with adhesive tar applied to the back. The tile is HotGlass "Classic CartGlass Blended." An adhesive primer was applied over the wood base of the shower structure. Then the foam backer was adhered and secured with screws every six inches of vertical surface. The mortar for installing the tile was applied directly over the foam. The porosity of the foam allows it to secure to the mortar, and a flexible grout additive decreases the risk of cracking.

The 14" glass vessel sink fits under the single-lever faucet on the Cali Bamboo countertop surface. Water temperatures in the shower are controlled by a Grohe "Euphoria" chrome fixture. Water flow control devices are installed on every water fixture, and a small hot water tank encourages short showers. Lighting is custom LED with two light levels, from ultra-low to high-voltage bright.

Since Hofmann is 6' 4", he designed a generous convertible bed using locally supplied, lightweight materials and Sunbrella indoor-outdoor fabrics. Clothing is stored in two wardrobes: one at the end of the countertop and one in the bathroom. Under the countertop there are six drawers which function as a dresser. For reading books, Hofmann uses his iPhone, and he reads online periodicals via the iMac.

Design is about choices, and the intention of sustainability in design is to eliminate negative environmental impact on our world. It is about designing something for life and creating the capacity to endure within the design. For more information, go to www.hofarc.com •••

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