

As American as the Clay on the Walls

By Kevin Fritz

Going green just got a lot more colorful. For the vegetarian-fare Dandelion Communita Café in Orlando, it's a combination of Bluefield, Jasper, Bryce Canyon and Tuscan Gold that now adorn its walls in the form of good old natural American clay.

Julie Norris, co-proprietor of the Dandelion Communita Café - the first café in the southeast to be certified green by Green America for its sustainable business practices - says the 1925 renovated home with white plaster walls was in dire need of a makeover, but she was reluctant to put paint on the walls and hoped for a greener alternative.

Meanwhile in Tampa, Ryan Barry of Elemental Concepts, the local distributor of American Clay products, was looking to showcase his environmentally friendly natural earth plaster in a business that would reach the right kind of people - those who would appreciate it and spread the word about the product to others. With the matchmaking efforts of Orlando artist and plaster installer Jeff Barrett, (pictured right), a partnership was born.

"We got a showroom out of the deal," notes Barry, "and Julie got to spruce up her business."



photo courtesy of Kevin Fritz



Each room of the café now features a unique texture and finish to demonstrate the versatile looks the clay plaster can achieve, including shimmering mica dust and crushed hay embedded directly into the clay. The variety of original colors is designed to create a soothing and more vibrant atmosphere.

"As an eco-minded business, this gets us even deeper into the green aspect of what we are," says Norris. "It's just the beginning of a green makeover of the entire house."

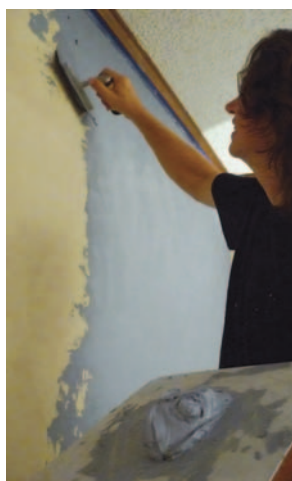
Barry, whose one-year-old company offers the clay in 45 non-VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) colors, explains the plaster is produced from light

clay found in Georgia - as opposed to the state's renowned red clay - and is a natural, environmentally friendly alternative to paint or cement, acrylic and lime plasters. He says it can be used on any residential or commercial interior space, and it qualifies toward points to have the home or office LEED certified by the U.S. Green Building Council.

But it's not just all for show. The breathability of the clay releases negative ions, which are believed to produce biochemical reactions that increase levels of the mood-regulator chemical serotonin. Serotonin helps alleviate depression, relieve stress, and boost daytime energy. Barry says earth plasters can increase negative ions by 10 to 20 times in an indoor environment. Its natural qualities also allow it to absorb moisture, which is a key advantage in the humid climate of Florida.

Moreover, Norris adds it also helps drop the temperature of the café, saving on energy and her power bills.

"Having Elemental Concepts do its thing here at the café keeps us true to our mission, and creates a healthier atmosphere for patrons and employees," she says.



photos courtesy of Dandelion Café