

BY EMILY LIEBERT | PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEMMA COMAS

LIVING FOR THE WORLD

THE OWNER OF AN
ECO-FRIENDLY,
HAND-CRAFTED RUG
COMPANY LIVES
GREEN AT WORK
AND AT HOME







FOR MANY OF US, LIVING GREEN means recycling or buying a Toyota Prius—things that, while helpful, require minimum sacrifice. But Elizabeth Eakins has dedicated her life to eco-friendly living. Eakins, owner of the eponymous company that produces sumptuous, hand-crafted rugs from natural fibers, took pains when searching for a new headquarters a few years ago to find a site that would have as small an ecological impact as possible. She found it at a former 1950s floor-wax factory that was sitting on polluted land in South Norwalk. Not only did she recondition the building, but she cleaned the landscape (at considerable expense) to make it habitable again—a triumph of architectural and ecological re-use.

Years earlier—long before the current green living frenzy—Eakins brought the same eco-friendly fervor to the late-1700s, Greek Revival-style Westport home she shares with her husband Jerry, a farmer. The couple has called the 3,400-square-foot house on one-and-half acres—whose property also includes an adjacent seven acres of wetland—their main residence for 18 years. (They also have a farm in Kansas.) “Westport is not just a bedroom community,” says Eakins. “It has a very diverse, active population and good public services.”



Blue Crush | Elizabeth Eakins' Sanabi Red fabric covering the cushion on an 18th-century Chippendale chair (OPPOSITE) is a modern complement to the red table found at the Brimfield Antique Fair. The collection of creamware is from Nancy Fishelson Antiques in Woodbury. Eakins uses baskets, like the Moroccan basket underneath the table, instead of built-ins for all-natural portable storage. **Steppin' Out** | Eakins stands with her weimaraner, Emma, in front of the terrace steps (ABOVE LEFT), which sport old bluestone treads. The terrace is made of recycled brick and the walls are constructed from stones collected from the property. **Local Flavor** | The kitchen cabinetry (ABOVE) was built by Tom Officer of Litchfield. Early 19th-century Chippendale chairs surround an 18th-century American table. See Resources.

EAKINS BRINGS HER EARTHY APPROACH INDOORS, TOO,
WITH “EASY AND TIMELESS” INTERIORS THAT SHE DESIGNED HERSELF

Location aside, Eakins' property is a testament to the way she lives her life—keenly aware of her surrounding environment and the peril it faces. Turn into the driveway—made of pebble, not asphalt, because “the earth needs to breathe”—and you enter a microclimate for which no chemicals are allowed. Once a year water is filtered through a porous bag containing organic compost, and the enriched fluid nourishes the soil. (The grass, naturally grown, is watered only by Mother Nature.) The steps to the terrace, where Eakins spends much of her time, are made of recycled brick with treads of bluestone recycled from an old church; the foundation was built from stones on the property.

Inside the front door, the original pine floors and new ones that have been oiled and buffed with soy accentuate the light-filled interior. “If you take your shoes off, you are still walking on the earth,” says Eakins, who prides herself on the tranquil atmosphere she’s created. “There’s no TV, no microwave, and no big computers. The goal is to have as little current as possible moving through the structure at all times.”

Her commitment doesn’t end there. While she recently

installed air conditioning, the home is primarily cooled by the shade of mature trees. Low-VOC paints grace the walls and all products—cleaning or otherwise—are environmentally friendly. “I had asthma as a child and the air I breathe must be clean—no perfumes, odors, ammonia or chlorine-based items,” explains Eakins, who also adheres to a vegetarian diet. “I don’t use any animal proteins in cooking. We eat organic food and don’t drink carbonated beverages.” Beyond the menu, kitchen counter tops are oiled hardwood or stainless steel. All utensils are wood or bamboo and pans are EPA-approved metal. She uses few paper products and no plastic food containers or canned food. “I have a compost tub on the terrace for all kitchen waste,” she says.

Water for drinking, cooking and washing white clothing passes through an ultraviolet filtration system, and all curtains, upholstery and linens in the three bedrooms are made from natural fibers. Furniture is hardwood with non-toxic finishes and mattresses lack metal infrastructures to reduce the electromagnetic field. There is no cedar in the house, but lavender is used for air purification and moth proofing.

Meander into the garden, which is mulched with organic



Down to Earth | In the living room (ABOVE), an English tile-top table is a platform for an American pickle jar lamp, an early 20th-century Hudson River School painting and one of Eakins' arrangements. The seat of a 19th-century English armchair was recovered in Eakins' Hannab Cronell pattern. **Be Seated** | Armchairs in her Elsie Steele fabric flank a table from Circa Antiques (RIGHT) and the linen wool curtains are actually ber rugs, hung to create window panels. **Soy Good** | The floors (OPPOSITE) throughout the house are either original pine or new ones that have been oiled and buffed with soy. See Resources.









Sleep Lightly | In one of the bedrooms, an antique French garden table from a Paris flea market (OPPOSITE) holds a collection of ceramic pieces by Connecticut artisan Frances Palmer. **Sweet Dreams** | Crisp white linens from Nancy Stanley cover the bed (TOP) and stacked French baskets make for clever storage. **British Empire** | In another bedroom (ABOVE), 19th-century Indian watercolors create an interesting collage above an 18th-century English Regency table. **Clean and Simple** | The unfussy bathroom (ABOVE RIGHT) is outfitted by Waterworks. See Resources.

homemade compost, and you'll find no sprinkler system—the lawn is mowed high to retain water—and no chemicals. "I use fish minerals if something is suffering to help calm it, and all of the leaf waste gets composted to be mulch," says Eakins. As a result, "The plants have gained strength and are more disease-resistant." She adds, "My husband and I are organic farmers. What we eat, we grow."

Eakins brings her earthy approach indoors, too, with "easy and timeless" interiors that she designed herself. The color scheme—platinum, blues, lichens, sage, tans and pale umbers—fosters a relaxing, comfortable environment in which friends and family can gather along with Emma, their 14-year-old weimaraner. "I love to cook and have guests. Above all, I relish the simplicity of an old house—lots of windows, beautiful proportions, good lines and

rooms of nice scale," says Eakins.

Baskets instead of built-ins inhabit the 10-room residence. "They're easy, portable storage, and they breathe naturally," Eakins explains. An avid gardener, she embellishes with sprays of colorful flowers in glass vases, juxtaposing different shapes and volumes. Most of the furniture is antique—English, Scottish and Irish, a nod to her heritage.

A devoted homemaker and businesswoman, Eakins says the line between the two is blurry. A testament to these dual roles is the hand-hooked wool rug she made in a pattern called Fanny, which runs the length of the stairs, landing and upstairs hall. "To this day, it is still the prettiest rug I have," says Eakins, who wouldn't change a thing about her surroundings. "Our home is a jewel as it is." ☀