

ORIGINATE NATURAL BUILDING MATERIALS SHOWROOM

By Diane Daly

Natasha Winnik, owner of Originate Natural Building Materials Showroom, has never been a stuff buff. Eight years ago she was a just a freckle-faced community activist in the Dunbar Spring neighborhood, who understood that living sustainably was about "interconnectedness."

Then she saw a connection that was short. Well-built homes are crucial parts of communities, yet even such a short time ago, natural building materials in Tucson were

only considered a market "for people in Birkenstocks, and vegetarians," she remembers. With her background in architecture, she decided she could add natural building components into the big picture of eco-living in Tucson. That was the origin of Originate. "Originate focuses on natural design finishes because I saw that piece as important, and I didn't see anyone else supplying those things," she says. Still, "the community activist part is the

part I'm more passionate about."

Natasha is notable now not only for her foresight—Green building is one part of the building industry that is growing right now—but also for the building she chose for her store. She bought the warehouse at 526 N. 9th Ave., one of many buildings the Arizona Department of

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ECOBBLUE

By Diane Daly

The shop windows of the new EcoBlue headquarters on 5th and Broadway are empty except for one piece of furniture: A table and chairs made of what looks like white porcelain and gleaming chrome, with all the lush curvature you'll find in a urinal.

Was that an indelicate choice of words? Not if you're in the urinal business. EcoBlue first set up shop in our desert to market the Cube, described on their website as "a small dissolvable urinal block capable of very simply converting standard urinals to highly water-efficient, odor-free devices." The method is ingenious. Your typical urinal gets coated and clogged with stinky pathogens unless it's flushed frequently and cleaned with harmful chemicals. But put the Cube in there and those pathogens are enzymatically dissolved, thanks to the pleasantly-scented barrier created by the Cube's teams of migrating, friendly bacteria. Not friendly like, "Hello Appendage, I'm jumping on!" but friendly as in not harmful to your body or the environment.

The cube is EcoBlue's primary marketed product, but water conservation is their business. Owner Damian Cox ran a Financial Planning firm in Australia until he had "an epiphany" in July 2004, when a client disappointed in the return rate of her 401K declared, "I'm not happy!" Sitting at a bare table in the EcoBlue office as the sun shone in, Cox, an energetic fellow in his 30s, told me, "While she was on the phone with me I began thinking about the world, and how most of them have no idea what a 401K plan is. And then I didn't care about her 401K plan either. I had to do something sustainable for the planet!"



After a lengthy process obtaining a visa, he and partner Carly Langman moved to the US to market the EcoBlue Cube, and it was Arizona they found the most receptive to the Cube. Now they rent a house a few blocks away from their downtown shop, and walk to work.

Within a few months, the EcoBlue shop front will be a "Water Efficiency Showcase," Cox says, featuring products that could set the bar way ahead when it comes to conservation in this country. Among EcoBlue's innovations is a spray rinse valve that uses .75 gallons per minute, when even the standard low-water-use model uses more than twice that much, and a faucet aerator that uses .84gpm when the standard efficient model uses 1.5gpm.

Cox says he brought the Cube to the US because "everything that happens in the US eventually happens in Australia." But that trend could be reversed when it comes to water use. Australia is in the midst of the worst drought in a thousand years, which has had devastating effects on farmers, and has opened everyone's eyes to the preciousness of water as a resource. "The opportunity that people in Arizona have is to be ahead of the curve and act before a crisis comes down on them," Cox says. "Which it will."

Help dissolve the EcoBlue Cube in urinals at Hotel Congress, Barrio Food and Drink, the Historic Y, and Pima Community College Downtown, or purchase your own Cube at ecoblue-cube.com.