

GREEN CORNER



Platters (\$28 each) made from Indonesian palm leaves.

Cozily conscientious

With its crackling fireplace, living room-like layout and wonderfully eclectic array of socially conscious gifts, Greenheart is bound to make you feel good about shopping. The new River North retail nook opened in November as another arm of the Center for Cultural Interchange, the non-profit international exchange organization housed in the same building.

On our first visit to Greenheart, we were stopped short by this shapely red platter (above), which we imagined as an elegant nest for dried grasses, fruits or nuts. The vessel is crafted from a palm leaf by Indonesian artisans. As with all of Greenheart's goods, the sales aid the artists who made them, in addition to the sustainable, socially responsible working environments that support them.

The concept of fair trade can be a tough one to support inventory-wise, but we were impressed with Greenheart's rich, reasonably priced selection of woven baskets, wood trays, bamboo bowls, green glass, jewelry and handbags.

— Shaila Wunderlich, swunderlich@tribune.com

GREENHEART

746 N. LaSalle St., 312-264-1625, greenheartshop.org

Hours: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Mondays to Wednesdays and Fridays; 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursdays; 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays



Greenheart is one of a handful of fair-trade, eco-friendly gift shops to open in recent months in the Chicago area.

5 HOME TRENDS to look for in 2008

With a weak dollar curtailing travel abroad and pricey gasoline curbing our stateside road trips, 2008 just may turn out to be the year we stay put — happily, updating our homes with cutting-edge gadgetry, enjoying back-yard retreats and indulging in eco-friendly decorating. At least that's how Ann Mack, director of trendspotting at ad agency JWT, sees it. She thinks we'll be indulging in "staycations" this year, seeking solace in our own beautified back yards. Here's what Mack has to say about the top trends she sees for our homes in the coming year.

— Marcia Borucki, mborucki@tribune.com



1 Living large in the yard. Expect back yards to become an even greater extension of our living space, another area to flex our decorating muscles. But because we'll be traveling less, we'll also want our outdoor space to function, Mack says, as "a home away from home, a tropical oasis with exotic gardens and interesting-shaped pools." And as entertaining continues to move outdoors, expect outdoor kitchens to rival their indoor counterparts with "more investments in big-time grills."

2 Eco-chic turns eco-thrifty.

Homeowners will continue to adopt green strategies to save money, as energy prices remain high, Mack says. It also will become a practical matter, as creating an eco-chic home will have an enhanced value. Look for more banks to offer special mortgages and financing for homeowners doing green renovations, and more recycled and recyclable materials being used in construction and rehabbing.

3 The local option. Back yards may be getting more exotic, but they're also getting more

homespun. As more people become concerned about the cost and quality of their produce, back-yard vegetable gardens will flourish. Mack says this is part of the eating-local movement, "as local as you can get." For city dwellers, community gardens will increase in popularity.

4 High-tech hideaways.

As gadgets, tech gear and appliances threaten to overtake our homes, furniture designers will come to our rescue. Expect to see functional furnishings that embrace electronics, Mack says. From nightstands to coffee tables, new designs will focus on reducing cable clutter and increasing storage, and will include built-in power strips.

5 Clutter cutters.

In the new year, organization will continue to be a priority. And as the amount of gadgetry we've amassed grows, so does our desire to end the electronic chaos. Enter the e-clutter consultant. People will hire these consultants, Mack says, "to help them organize their tech assets, to consolidate their electronics into one platform ... to unclutter the e-clutter."

YOUR A/V GUY

On the ball: little spheres put the 'round' in surround sound

By Kevin Hunt

Special to the Tribune

Coming from esteemed French loudspeaker manufacturer Cabasse, the new Alcyone home-theater system is more *crudites* than *blanquette de veau*.

The petite Alcyone (\$1,059), built for the less-developed audio palate of the North American market, is a long, long way from Cabasse's main-course speakers, such as the \$150,000-a-pair La Sphere. Perhaps it's a new path plotted by Canon Europe, which bought Cabasse in late 2006.

Or maybe it's a tiny sampler of what Cabasse's grand high-end spherical speakers can do. Consider these ears teased. Despite some sonic sacrifices, the Alcyone is the best little-ball package I've heard since the made-in-the-U.S. Orb Audio Mod1. The ridiculously small Alcyone speakers — a quintet of 3¼-inch-diameter steel balls partnered with a Santorin 17 subwoofer — reveal an acute appreciation of America's distaste for speaker clutter too.

That's what will sell consumers on this system, designed in France and manufactured in China. The satellite speakers are so small that they can fit only a single, full-range driver instead of the customary two drivers, a tweeter for the high frequencies and a woofer for the lower frequencies. The 3-inch drivers short-change some of the high notes, noticeable perhaps as a slight flattening the shimmer of a cymbal, and miss just about everything on the lower end.

The Santorin 17, a standard boxed-design subwoofer with a 6½-inch driver powered by an onboard 200-watt amplifier, fills in that lower end but ultimately is asked to do too much. And limited by its own modest size — not quite a 12-inch cube — it can't produce the room-shaking rumble of larger subwoofers.

The satellites don't even have room for speaker-wire connections. Instead, two lead wires emerge from the back of each



The Cabasse Alcyone home-theater speaker system.

speaker, making it look like a bomb! The speaker snaps into the magnetic base of a plastic stand that doubles as a wall mount and also includes the speaker-wire connectors. The lead wires and the speaker wire (included) from your audio-video receiver meet at these connectors. It works, but it's highly unusual.

The speakers produce almost omnidirectional sound, which makes any seat in the room a perfect spot. After a recent movie-watching session, I switched to Luciana Souza's latest CD, the disappointing (and ugly-Americanized) "The New Bossa Nova" and assumed I was still listening to surround sound.

But no, it was generic two-channel stereo. Two little Alcyone balls were throwing out wall-to-wall Souza. The subwoofer, better suited to movie soundtracks, huffed and puffed a bit. This happens with any compact

Try It

What: Cabasse Alcyone home-theater speaker system.

Price: \$1,059

Hot: Swedish-meatball speakers available in white or black; excellent sound for a tiny system.

Not: Sonic limitations of compact speakers.

Alternative: Orb Audio Mod1, a similar set of five metal-ball speakers and a superior subwoofer at a lower price (\$798, orb.audio.com).

Info: cabasse.com; for dealer information, email info@stjohn-group.com or call 877-588-0075.

system that asks a subwoofer to cover too much sonic ground, compensating for the other speakers' low-frequency failings. Remedy: Adjust the subwoofer volume for movies (higher) and music (lower).

The Alcyone, unmistakably, is a small-room system. Leonardo DiCaprio as Howard Hughes in the HD DVD version of "Aviator" crash-landing his XF-11 (circa 1946) into a neighborhood beyond the Wilshire Country

Club sounded just a bit polite. You can see the hi-def devastation via the HD DVD player, but not necessarily feel the impact with a thud.

Yet for the price, and certainly the size, the Alcyone would make my short list of subcompact systems. It virtually disappears in a room while balancing necessary sonic trade-offs with some great sound clearly influenced by a long history of loudspeaker design.

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