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*Confessions of a Green Goddess*



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**T**he world's answer to modern, "green" simplicity in design might just be Iceland's greatest export. MINARC, a Santa Monica, CA-based minimalist architecture and design firm founded by Icelandic couple Tryggvi Thorsteinsson and Erla Dögg Ingjaldsdóttir in 1999 has some great ideas about what it means to be eco-friendly, but they say it's just common sense.



MINARC's style is what Erla and Tryggvi stated as "functional for modern living", meaning designing a home that is functional for its inhabitants and functional to meet energy needs, or what Erla describes as "eco-function". Before MINARC even begins designing, land surveys and studies are conducted to determine what the plot of land's natural location can offer the architects. The team might conduct a sun or wind study for example, and while designing along the coastal regions of California, it is likely that the design might even be able to take advantage of catching a breeze from the ocean for home ventilation. Unlike many other "green" architects, MINARC's approach is unique in the sense that they seem to be not as concerned with installing eco-friendly afterthoughts, but understanding who will occupy the structure being built and what their needs are and what that land can naturally offer them. To Erla, "a big part of being eco-friendly is taking advantage of what you have...the simplest answer is using common sense". Although many of MINARC's projects are LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) Certified and recognized by the USGBC (United States Green Building Council), the certifications are not what drive them to design sustainably but that design should be that way.

Erla and Tryggvi's Icelandic background has a lot to do with the couple's approach to sustainability; because Iceland is an island with a very small amount of native trees, wood is not in abundance and what is consumed by the country's citizens is either naturally found on the island or imported in from elsewhere. Not to mention, Iceland's mild climate and breathtaking beauty is hardly easy to pollute. Iceland has the highest fractions of renewable energy of any country and yet some of the lowest fractions of carbon emissions. Erla and Tryggvi pointed out the differences in eco-consciousness between the American living and the rest of the world (Iceland for example) has a lot to do with the "disposable culture" that is maintained within this country in particular. "Tryggvi grew up way up north with not even a doctor around...all this luxury here that we don't even appreciate" says Erla. "At that time there was one T.V. station that was off on Thursdays and for six weeks during the summer".



Although both of them hail from Iceland, this dynamic couple met in the United States through work and has been married since 2001. Dotted around the walls of MINARC's studio are evidence of a happy marriage- family photos of their three beautiful daughters, ages thirteen, five, and two. When asked what it is like to have her husband as her partner, Erla replied, "I couldn't think it any other way. It's a totally different relationship, and you have to build it up from that...because the practice is so dedicated, it is ideal to have your other half with you to complete that unit. Either (working together) will drive you apart or make you stronger, and you find out early in the relationship whether it will work or not so you are not wasting any time".