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## Sleep Goes Green

By Coeli Carr

After Cecile Langelier started experiencing sleep-depriving aches from her new gardening ventures at home in Corning, Calif., last year, she and her partner Dennis Nelson decided the best balm might be a better mattress. Little did they know it would be made out of natural latex. "There was a support and softness that can only be described as being in my mother's arms," says Langelier, a former organizational-development consultant. "It was like lying down on a cloud."

The cost of this piece of paradise--a king-size mattress manufactured by Vivètique under its Natural Bedroom brand, which the couple bought last fall in Greenfeet Natural Home Store, in nearby Chico--was just less than \$2,160, including the wood-slatted foundation. But in addition to sticker shock was an even bigger eye opener. "I didn't know latex was a natural material," said Langelier.

Sleep, of all things, is going natural. According to the International Sleep Products Association, sales of mattresses and foundations shipped by the U.S. mattress industry are increasing more than 10% annually, and totaled \$6.396 billion at wholesale in 2005. The noninnerspring mattress segment is showing even more strength, and grew 28% between 2004 and 2005. It's clear that natural-latex mattresses (the terms natural latex and natural rubber are often used interchangeably) are coming into their own. "The latex category, including synthetic blends, is creating a strong buzz in the industry," says Dave Perry, executive editor of trade publication Furniture/ Today. "When you lie down, you can feel the nice, cushy resilience of the latex."

Despite its better-known identification with gloves and condoms, latex starts its life cycle as a substance collected from *Hevea brasiliensis*, better known as the rubber tree. Vivètique in Arcadia, Calif., gets the natural-latex mattress cores primarily from its supplier in Sri Lanka and finishes them with a cover of quilted wool and cotton. "More than half of the inquiries we get are from consumers who don't want

synthetic fire retardants in their mattresses," says Scott Carwile, who co-owns Vivètique with his brother Steve. "More people are doing their homework."

Sales of natural mattresses have not been resting. Several years ago, Vivètique's natural-latex mattress sales--prices range from \$2,000 to \$9,000, excluding the foundation--represented less than 5% of its mattress revenues. In 2006, sales of its Natural Bedroom natural-latex mattresses--which have been increasing at a rate of about 35% for each of the past four years, and whose mattresses Vivètique wholesales to more than 400 retailers in the U.S., Canada and Australia--brought in close to \$4 million for the company.

Sleeptek, an organic-bedding manufacturer based in Ottawa, Canada, has also reaped the benefits of increased consumer interest in the material. In 2000, sales of the company's Green Sleep natural-latex mattresses represented only 20% of total revenues, vs. those of innerspring mattresses. In 2006 Sleeptek's sales of natural-latex mattresses from Green Sleep and its newer Obasan line--up 30% from 2005--were 60% of the company's \$4 million revenues.

Jean Corriveau, the company's founder and owner, says the product has gone beyond early adapters and "green" retailers. "Now we go head to head against mainstream brands and specialty mattresses like Tempur-Pedic and into traditional bedding stores which, three years ago, would have been unthinkable," he says. "That's where the growth is now, in mainstream stores that want something more unique." Green Sleep's best-selling Vimala mattress retails for about \$5,000, including the foundation. Thirty-five retailers and spas carry Green Sleep in the U.S.

Plunging into natural latex may not only feel good but may also be good for you. "I like natural latex because of its breathability, and by its very nature, latex is a supportive material," says Michael Breus, a clinical psychologist specializing in sleep disorders and the author of Good Night: The Sleep Doctor's 4-Week Program to Better Sleep and Better Health. Too pricey? One-third of our lives is spent lying in bed, says Carlos H. Schenck, a staff psychiatrist at the Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorders Center and the author of Sleep: The Mysteries, the Problems and the Solutions. "How important is your sleep?" he asks. "If you like the comfort and quality of natural latex, it may be a very cost-effective investment."

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