



LARBI BELKOUCH,  
RICHELLE WHITE

# Herb'n Renewal

GREEN RHYMES WITH CLEAN

Most mainstream household cleaners contain ingredients like trisodium nitrilotriacetate and methylene chloride. Daunting, no? Well, imagine turning over a bottle of wood cleaner, only to see its ingredients listed as vinegar and tangerine oil ... or disinfecting your carpet with a concoction made of peppermint and lemon verbena. Since last August, one couple has been mixing and selling these sustainable products to St. Louisans, who are now happily “cleaning with a conscience.”

For Richelle White and Larbi Belkouch, it all began when Ms. White’s allergist told her the cleaning solvents used in her home were causing her frequent asthma flare-ups. After Mr. Belkouch, a research scientist, mixed up some alternatives, Ms. White asked her maid to give one a try the next time she cleaned the house.

Problem solved—the potion worked. And so began Herb’n Maid.

Not only do Ms. White and Mr. Belkouch pride themselves on using “things you can actually pronounce” as ingredients for their all-purpose cleaners and fabric fresheners, they also began a full-service cleaning business that uses HEPA filters in its vacuums, reusable microfiber mops and washable baby diapers (pre-baby!) as cleaning cloths. But as Ms. White explains, this is about “cleaning up the indoor air quality.” With the laboratory and store-room located in the couple’s Richmond Heights home, the company is keeping its carbon footprint to a minimum.

“It’s pretty glamorous,” laughs White. “People show up in the morning to check out keys and equipment, and I’m usually in my pajamas making breakfast ...”

In just one year, Herb’n Maid has been in nearly 1,000 homes, cleaning and advising customers on how to make their habits more environmentally friendly. Ms. White has hired eight part-time contractors, none



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with professional cleaning backgrounds—but all on the green clean mission.

“You can teach them how to use a product, but you can’t teach them to care,” she says.

After a free “Green Clean Consultation” to assess the needs, hourly rates begin at \$29 with a two-hour minimum.

“It surprises me how emotional it is,” says Ms. White. “When I go into a home, sometimes people will break down into tears. When I go in, I’m going in as a consultant—what are your needs? Why are you interested in this?”

She pauses and then she smiles. “And you never know what’s gonna come from that.”

—SARAH TRUCKEY