

# VAL DE VIE

MAGAZINE

A life worth living

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## Living the Green

WHAT WILL DEFINE OUR LIVES, OUR ENVIRONMENTS, IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD? ECO-DESIGNERS URGE US TO THINK, BUY AND CONSUME DIFFERENTLY.

BY MARTIN JACOBS



1. IKEA's Gunrid curtain is coated in a substance that rids spaces of airborne pollutants.
2. Multidisciplinary studio Seymourpowell's artificially intelligent chaise longue atomises beauty products onto the user.
3. Straddling art and design, Kathrine Barbro Bendixen stretches and weaves cow intestines to create unique lights.



DESIGNERS able to grow furniture, create lighting from cow intestines and protect our data as well as our planet are becoming increasingly relevant in a world coming to terms with surviving a pandemic.

Shortly before Covid-19 struck and hashtags like #socialdistancing and #stayathome were yet to dominate global headlines, Cape Town's annual Design Indaba hosted international trend forecaster Li Edelkoort. The former director of Design Academy Eindhoven spoke about an emerging green wave in design, one in which a new generation of youthful warriors was primed to embrace bio-technology through 'hugging trees, idolising plants and favouring vegetables'. But her audiences were curious: how was this movement going to change the way we live and work in the face of a viral pandemic?

If the tail-end of the last decade was marked by global challenges, such as the effects of Australia and the United States' devastating wildfires, and the rise in influence of eco-warriors like Greta Thunberg, then the start of the 2020s has forced us all to think about how our own private living spaces need to change.

'For several years, we have understood that in order to survive as a species and to keep the planet going, we need to make draconian changes to the way we live, travel, consume and entertain,' Edelkoort told Marcus Fairs, editor-in-chief of *Dezeen*. At the vanguard of those changes is a global force of emerging and established designers who are re-evaluating the way we live. Their innovations will serve us well in a post-pandemic world. Some upcycle waste, others reinvent plastic, a few consider playful ways to ensure privacy in a digitally invasive age – all tackle the adaptability of design.

### Purity and Privacy in a Digital Age

For many, home will likely remain the new office. It should therefore be a toxin- and contamination-free environment. Manufacturers of smart home systems will ramp up their offerings, ensuring that indoor air is not just thermostatically controlled, but purified too.

Air pollution remains an environmental health risk. IKEA product developer Mauricio Affonso has been working on an air-purifying curtain called Gunrid. Its surface is coated with a mineral-based substance that reacts to both indoor and outdoor light, ridding interior spaces of formaldehydes and other pollutants.

Equally focused on purity, London-based studio Seymourpowell has conceptualised the Atmosphere chaise longue. Through artificial intelligence, it filters air, adjusts temperature and humidity levels, and atomises personalised beauty products, like sunscreens, projecting them onto the user as vapour, thereby creating a 'beauty bubble' that cocoons against airborne pollutants.

Working remotely will mean more screen time and a greater reliance on virtual assistants like Amazon's Alexa. And, in a post-pandemic environment, we will be far more aware – and wary – of data-mining devices such as the mobile phone apps used to monitor the spread of coronavirus. 'When considering data as the oil of the 21st century, each of us is sitting on a small ground treasure – a resource that is being discretely mined by the most valuable companies in the world,' say emerging German designers Katja Trinkwalder and Pia-Marie Stute. They are collaborators on a project titled Accessories for the Paranoid. In response to a growing number of products that survey their users and use the mined data, the pair have created a series of four parasitic accessories. The most amusing of the four, Kidding Alexa, allows the user to preselect film dialogue that produces fake data, thereby confusing data-mining algorithms.

Glasgow School of Art graduate Erlend Prendergast's CounterBug device is anthropomorphic. Three tongue-in-cheek attachments – Blabber, Murmur and Scramble – perform similar tasks to those of Trinkwalder and Stute's by acting as digital self-defence. Of his satirical device, Prendergast says, 'There is an inherent irony at the core of the project, because really, the only way to defend against Alexa is not to buy an Alexa.'

### Plastic's Afterlife

While we spend more time at home, the value of time we spend in nature will exponentially increase. Concerns about nature's health and the environmental impact of single-use and 'virgin' plastics will become commonplace. Pioneering designers are taking an increased interest in creating new materials from recycled

## design

plastic. Creative reworkings of existing plastics can be manipulated into an array of colours, and – more importantly – can often be freely sourced. Recycled plastic is the stimulus for creativity and a shift in thinking: they set out to elevate the desirability of recycled plastic as a material, giving it worth and merit in a contemporary home.

Proclaiming plastic to be the new gold, designers Joost Dingemans and Marten van Middelkoop founded Rotterdam-based Plasticiet. Sourcing industrial plastic waste across the Netherlands, the pair is inspired by patterns within natural stone. They create sheet material – kneaded and stretched like taffy confectionary – which they retail to other designers. Their quirkiest offering, Chocolate Factory, which they describe as ‘just as magical as Charlie walking around in a lavish candy garden’, is manufactured from old chocolate moulds. Equally appealing is their pearlescent furniture collection, Mother of Pearl, which they hope shows the extent to which recycled plastics can rival luxury materials.

The Netherlands-based craftsman-inventor Dirk van der Kooij works with his hands and a furniture-extruding robot. The result is his 3D-printed Chubby Chair, which has earned a place in the permanent collections of both the London and Vitra Design Museums. His striking Meltingpot Table is made from the discarded fossils of 20th-century waste, CDs and their cases.

EcoBirdy transforms old plastic toys into children’s furniture. Founders Vanessa Yuan and Joris Vanbriel have developed their own recycling process whereby the cleaning and grinding processes not only result in a product that is free of harmful chemicals, but means that ultimately their own designs can be recycled too. Their award-winning Kiwi storage container and Rhino lamp are both designed to raise awareness of endangered species.

Australian industrial designer Brodie Neill operates from his London studio. Neill’s recent focus has been on ocean-polluting microplastic. Collaborating with engineers, manufacturers and scientists, Neill has created a composite material he calls Ocean Terrazzo. Its speckled, jewel-like appearance, evident in his Flotsam bench, elevates the status of repurposed microplastic.

While the threat that microplastics pose to the environment is also the driving force behind De-

sign Indaba speaker Elissa Brunato’s work, her proposed shift in manufacturing processes differs. Brunato abandoned her career in the fashion industry to pursue a Masters in material futures. She now sees herself as a sustainable materials explorer. Her bio-iridescent sequin project uses biotechnology and the power of cellulose (an organic compound in plants) to create fade-free, compostable sequins.

## Waste Not, Want Not

Educational institutions like Design Academy Eindhoven and Central Saint Martins have spearheaded a global trend in creative thinking that favours planet-friendly biotechnology and the use of bio-waste in design and architecture.

Worldwide lockdowns have demonstrated how the temporary shutdown of factories can greatly reduce air pollution. In an opinion piece written for *Dezeen* exploring how life post-Covid-19 will affect our homes, Ukrainian architect Sergey Makhno suggests, ‘The new world will be about things that matter. There will be fewer objects and they will be chosen more responsibly. More questions will be asked: Are they made of natural materials? Does their production harm the planet?’

Eindhoven-based designer Thomas Vailly, in partnership with Atelier Luma, looks to plants, specifically sunflower by-products. Once farmed for oil, seeds and biofuel, the remaining parts of the sunflower, including its stalks and bark, conventionally go to waste but through clever manipulation, they can be converted into numerous organic materials.

Our sci-fi visions of the future have seldom included innovations crafted from animal by-products. It’s little wonder that our imaginations are piqued by the works of designers like Kathrine Barbro Bendixen and Gregg Moore. Barbro Bendixen fashions organic lighting – pendants and lamps – from cow intestines. The waste product, not sold as food, is stretched to create closed surfaces or cut into long threads and woven for a mesh-like finish. Straddling art and design, she equates her material to the breathable and waterproof attributes of seal intestines, traditionally used by the Inuit to make anoraks.

Favouring cow bones over intestines, American ceramicist Moore lends new meaning to farm-to-fork. In a commission for a farmlands restaurant, Moore has created a bespoke range of crockery made from the bones of cows reared for meat and dairy consumption. Pairing an 18th-century stoneware recipe with scientific advances in ceramic production, Moore highlights how mindful farming and modern technology can extend the reach of nose-to-tail philosophies.

Intrigued by biotechnology, Israeli furniture designer Erez Nevi Pana advocates veganism as a form of design, proclaiming, ‘You can’t be ethical at work and cruel at home.’ From soil and fungus, Nevi Pana has grown a dough that rises through a biochemical reaction. Shaped as chairs and stools, he then oven-bakes them. But two subsequent projects, Salts and Bleached, captured the design world’s attention. Nevi Pana submerged armatures of wood and loofah in the waters of the Dead Sea. Extended periods underwater allowed the loofah to absorb the sea’s rich salts, which crystallised on the stools, the subsequent pieces as tough as they are intricate.

Our homes should mirror our inner eco-consciousness. We should live in a manner that champions the advances of design warriors who not only grow furniture and transform waste products into coveted items but tread mindfully on the planet. ▽

