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IS YOUR HOME *ETHICAL*?

Meet the makers who will instantly elevate your eco credentials. By **Helen Chislett**

All too often, sustainability is an afterthought in design. The biggest hurdle is transparency – the days are gone when you could simply melt old plastic and sell it as a recycled fruit bowl. Sustainability is going through a much-needed rebranding,” says London-based Mexican designer Fernando Laposse, who launched the eco surface material Totomoxtle in 2016, and is now urging purveyors of luxury furnishings to do more in terms of accountability.

Laposse's veneer is made in Mexico from corn husks in colours that range from deep purples to soft creams. Each one is peeled off the cob, ironed flat and glued on to a paper pulp or textile backing, which is then cut by hand or lasered into small pieces and reassembled to make marquetry for furniture or interior surfaces. He operates in partnership with the Mixtec community of Tonahuixtla, where industrial agriculture has wreaked havoc on the lives of traditional farmers and herders. “The aggressive use of herbicides and pesticides has decimated native varieties of Mexican corn,” he says.

Previous page: the heirloom corn husks - in colours ranging from purple to cream - from which the eco surface material Totomoxtle is made. Right: London-based Mexican designer Fernando Laposse making marquetry from Totomoxtle, which he created in 2016. Bottom centre: Fernando Laposse oak and Totomoxtle table, €5,800



"Everything is so short-lived, it's no wonder people are longing for things that harmonise aesthetically, ethically and ecologically"

their own traditional values. Rich knows that this can frustrate those interior designers who want to control the design process, but says it is a compromise worth making. "You are still getting an amazing and beautiful work of art," she says.

Valadan believes that sustainability defines luxury. "It's not a thing, it's a feeling," she says. "Today, we are surrounded by so many synthetics and chemicals. Everything is so short-lived, it's no wonder people are longing for things that harmonise aesthetically, ethically and ecologically." She is dismissive of the idea that sustainability means compromising on beauty. "It makes it more beautiful," she says. "Our rugs are like a poem: the age and type of the wool, the way the master dyes the material, the minerals in the water, the touch of the weaver, the passion of the finisher and the mood of the sun. All of these affect the finished design. The more authentic and natural it is, the merrier it sings."

Luke Irwin, who began his eponymous rug business in 2003, is of a similar mind, recently launching his Botanical collection of wool rugs, coloured entirely from all-natural, organic dyes made from ingredients such as turmeric, tomato, indigo and henna. "I shy away from jumping on a bandwagon or beating the eco drum, but if all of us do the little we can, we could make a big difference," he says. "My production is in Nepal, India and Pakistan where the local ecology is impacted by great vats of chemical dyes that pollute rivers because of unscrupulous mass production." Irwin is aware that not all his customers will embrace the natural dyes immediately. "The challenge of natural dyes is that there can be colour variability of 10 per cent, which may be a risk some people won't take. With chrome-based chemical colours, you know exactly how it will look," he says. "My own view is that natural dyes add to the beauty of the rug, because the most beautiful pieces are antiques where the colour has faded over time, taking on a new character." So committed is he to the environmental potential of traditional vegetable dyes that this collection is less expensive than those made by artisans with conventional colourants. "It doesn't have to be like the supermarket where you pay more for organic," he says. "What makes me happy is that we can do something good and make it more accessible by ensuring it's cheaper than the non-sustainable version."

Irwin is not alone. Toulemonde Bochard has launched an organic collection of three lines - Eden, Tartan and Arum - each featuring natural dyes based on plants, minerals or spices. All of the wools and cottons in its rugs are certified as biodegradable or



Right: Studioart recycled-leather Pezzara rug, POA - the brand uses a technique where weft threads of recycled leather laces are woven into a warp of unspun cotton



recyclable and are sourced from organic, GMO-free farms and plantations. In a similar vein, leather specialist Studioart's Pezzara collections take its design cues from southern Italy's craft tradition of making artisan rugs and blankets from leftovers, using a technique where weft threads of recycled leather laces are woven into the warp of salvaged cotton. Deirdre Dyson, meanwhile, is focused on helping the communities where her rugs are made by preserving ancient crafts. Dyson has long been a partner of Goodweave (goodweave.org), established to end illegal child labour in many industries, and takes pride in providing sustainable employment to women in Nepal. "We aim to save ancient skills from extinction and provide employment in areas of crisis and poverty," she says. Christopher Farr highlighted its commitment to "preserving the unique cultures and traditions of rug- and textile-making in Afghanistan, decimated after years of conflict" at the recent London Design Festival. Its temporary exhibition presented with Turquoise Mountain (turquoisemountain.org) - a non-profit organisation founded in 2006 at the behest of the Prince of Wales - set out its aim to support a new generation of artisan entrepreneurs who will not only drive economic development in the region but, says the brand's co-founder and director Matthew Bourne, "preserve the rare skills found there, while providing access to some of the best wools and skills in the world for carpet-making".

High-end artisan rugs are not the only sector making eco-aware choices. Danish company Kvadrat has made a commitment to sustainability over the years with collections such as Re-wool, consisting of 45 per cent recycled wool. It launched Patio, its first outdoor textile, in January. Designed by Karina Nielsen Rios, the fabric is made from a specially developed yarn treated with an eco coating that does not contain fluorocarbon - a chemical finish typically applied to high-performance textiles to make them water, soil and oil-repellent. This produces toxic by-products that can pollute air and water systems, causing long-term environmental damage.

Helen Amy Murray, whose studio creates hand-sculpted surfaces and artworks in leathers, suedes and silks, is a recipient of Positive Luxury's Butterfly mark. This is awarded to luxury brands that demonstrate "a positive social and environmental impact"

- something that consumers are increasingly requesting. Murray's commitment to sustainability was a conscious decision from the start of her business. "I had created a technique that was intricately crafted by hand, so it was natural to create a company that was based on commissioning," she says. "Exclusive artworks create little waste and involve little travelling. We only order the materials required for a project, we reuse our leftovers, have reduced packaging and are very strict on recycling. I also made the decision that we wouldn't undertake installation. Our site-specific work is installed by experts already on the job - this means as a studio we stay based in London reducing our own carbon footprint."

Bernie de Le Cuona, founder and CEO of her eponymous furnishings company, takes a similar hard-line stance. "Sustainability is non-negotiable. Everyone can see the state of the world and luxury companies have a responsibility to drive attitudes forward," she says. "My hope is that values are shifting towards conscious consumption. We operate a circular economy wherever possible, so nothing will end up in landfills or be destroyed or burnt. We either re-colour lines that are discontinued or we give them to a charity that we collaborate with [the company works with Fine Cell Work: finecellwork.co.uk], which turns them into other products that benefit those who produce them. We mostly use natural linen and wool fibres, and very little cotton because cotton uses far more water." Next year, the brand will launch its first totally organic linen called De Le Cuona Pure. "It's a big step and has taken a lot of investment," de Le Cuona says. "Each phase, from the field where it is planted to arriving at our warehouse, has six or seven fully traceable stages. It is totally organic and 100 per cent sustainable." ♦

CRAFT FAIR

Christopher Farr, christopherfarr.com. **De Le Cuona**, delecuona.com. **Deirdre Dyson**, deirdredyson.com. **Front Rugs**, frontrugs.com. **Helen Amy Murray**, helenamymurray.com. **Kvadrat**, kvadrat.dk. **Luke Irwin**, lukeirwin.com. **Nature Squared**, naturesquared.com. **Studioart**, studioart.it. **Totomoxtle**, fernandolaposse.com. **Toulemonde Bochart**, toulemondebochart.fr.

ECO FOOTPRINTS



Deirdre Dyson hand-knotted wool/silk Plumes rug, £1,800 per sq m



Luke Irwin organically coloured wool Botanical rug, from £940 per sq m



Toulemonde Bochart organic wool Arum rug, from €1,567



Front Rugs x Lila Valadan handmade wool rug, from £787 per sq m



Christopher Farr Afghan-wool Assembled Stripe rug, £14,200