

Meeting of Minds

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Circular Thinking

A new class of furnishings aren't just made from earth-friendly materials and processes—they're designed to last more than a lifetime.

BY CAROLINE BIGGS



ABOVE: Laurence Carr used an array of upcycled and antique furnishings to craft The Restorative Room for the 2019 Hampton Designer Showhouse.

Sustainability has been trending for quite some time in the design world, but there's a new eco-minded buzzword on everyone's brain: *circularity*. This business model advocates for products to be in use for as long as possible as a way of reducing waste. To that end, circular design values creating items that are durable, reusable, easy to disassemble, repairable and recyclable. From a consumption standpoint, it can mean everything from restoring (rather than replacing) a vintage piece to only buying products made from recyclable and renewable materials.

Put simply: "Circularity in design is an approach to product and system design that aims to minimize waste and make the most efficient use of resources," says New York-based Laurence Carr, who specializes in regenerative design. "It focuses on creating products, services and systems with resource efficiency, life cycle assessment, upcycling and biodiversity in mind."

Designers can apply circular principles to a project in a variety of ways—from start to finish. During the client onboarding process, Lucy Penfield begins by identifying any and all furniture items that can be upcycled or repurposed. "It is certainly much easier to cast off old furniture and buy new, but that doesn't feel responsible," says the Wayzata, Minnesota-based designer. "Giving an old item new value through a change of location, color, or reupholstery brings great joy for all."

If you must buy new, Carr suggests looking for pieces crafted from reclaimed, recyclable or third-party-certified materials. Her designs for Studio Laurence, for instance, are made in partnership with B Corp-certified manufacturer Nature's Legacy, using zero-waste processes and innovative biomaterials. "Always start with a product's end of life in mind," she says. "Will

it be recycled? Upcycled? Is it biodegradable? Where and how? What manufacturing process will be used to make the product? Is it carbon neutral?"

Carr also recommends seeking out manufacturers and makers with repair and reuse programs—brands such as Fyrn, whose handcrafted solid wood pieces can be broken down and replaced in parts; and Double R Design, which offers both restoration services and upcycled vintage finds revamped in contemporary fabrics and finishes. "It's incredible how long a wood frame will last," says Double R founder Rachael Rosenblum. "They usually just need a little updating [to] be passed down from generation to generation."

Circular thinking should also come into play when discarding furniture pieces. In Minnesota, Penfield regularly donates castaways to nonprofit organizations such as Bridging and Hope Chest for Breast Cancer, which rehouse items to homes in need; in New York, the Materials for the Arts, a program of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, accepts everything from fabric and wallpaper offcuts to furniture. "We've grown to occupy a 35,000-square-foot warehouse in Long Island City, where we serve over 4,000 member organizations, including almost every public school in New York," says MFTA executive director Tara Sansone. "We welcome companies to drop off supplies at our loading dock, and we can also arrange trucking to pick up from donors—we want to make donating and supporting creative reuse as easy as possible for everyone."

In a perfect world, these choices would be easy—we'd live in homes furnished with zero-waste pieces that biodegrade or stand the test of time. Until then, Carr says it's essential to ask how we can apply the concepts of a circular economy to the built environment: "The more we designers understand how our industry contributes to waste and climate change problems, the more we can get creative in ways to mitigate those challenges." ■



Salvaged Style

The season's savviest finds take elevated upcycling to the next level.

BY CAROLINE BIGGS

1. Hand-stitched by quiltmakers at Vacilando Studios, **Quiet Town's** *Arco Canyon lumbar pillow* is constructed from remnants of domestically milled cotton canvas retrieved for reuse from the brand's production factories.
2. An homage to the cracked finishes of early-20th-century French antiques, the *Ayana chandelier* by **Arteriors** is adorned in carefully applied broken eggshells—ensuring that no two are exactly alike.
3. Swiss design studio Nature Squared transformed hatchet seashells into beguiling hand-inlaid faucet handles for **Dornbracht's** *Mem three-hole lavatory mixer*, shown in chrome.
4. Display treasures atop **Accent Decor's** rustic *Leonora column*, which is forged from aluminum waste like cast-aside kitchen cutlery and abandoned automobile scraps.
5. **Sunbrella's** ReMade line boasts a bevy of outdoor-ready designs, including the geometric *Table Runner 276*, assembled from leftover pieces of the brand's performance fabrics.
6. Don't let its playful look fool you—the *Luisa table* by **EcoBirdy**, available at Goodee, is a real multitasker. Not only is it constructed of upcycled plastic toys, but it transitions from a side table to a coffee table to a kid-friendly workstation with ease.
7. **Fyrn's** *Keyhole table* is reinforced with the brand's patented exposed metal brackets, which allow it to be broken down—and replaced—in parts.
8. Crafted from recycled sari silk and dyed strips of banana tree bark, **Omexco's** striped *Rainbows RAA1 wallcovering* is available in three versatile colorways.
9. **Sabai's** *Essential sofa*, shown in Amber, is outfitted in buttery soft recycled velvet and can be replaced in parts over time thanks to the brand's circular-minded Repair Don't Replace program.
10. Composed of centuries-old terra cotta reclaimed from the roofs of farmhouses and chateaus throughout the South of France, the *Parefeuille field tile* by **Ann Sacks** features a naturally weathered patina and comes in four distinct shapes, including hexagonal and square.
11. With the help of Le Point Visible, designer **Gillian Gillies** transformed castoff fashion fabrics from brands like Ralph Lauren into reversible patchwork quilts, including the square-and-arch-filled *Indigo Stripe throw*.

- 12. Nice kicks! **Particle**'s stone-inspired *Swirl round placemat and coaster* are composed of recycled sneaker soles.
- 13. Nature's beauty takes center stage in the *Oyster Shell mirror* by **Lowcountry Originals**, available through Wendover Art Group. Its pine wood frame is embellished with shells foraged off the coast of Georgia.
- 14. Woven by artisans in Rajasthan, India, the *Manchaha LE-114 rug* by **Jaipur Living** is made entirely of hand-spun yarn left over from completed carpets.
- 15. You can admire more than the looks of **Studio Laurence**'s *Stem vessel*. Made from reengineered recycled paper composite, it supplies an eco-friendly—but equally textural—alternative to traditional metal and stone vases.
- 16. Proof that the sky's the limit when it comes to good design: **Frisoli** repurposes aeronautical materials into sleek carbon-fiber-based furnishings such as the *Sfoglio side table* by Domenico De Palo, available at Artemest.
- 17. For the *Upholstered nightstand* by **Double R Design**, Rachael Rosenblum wrapped a salvaged chest of drawers in a graphic linen fabric from Antoinette Poisson for a fresh, of-the-moment look.
- 18. A color-flecked herringbone twill weave with an eco-conscious twist, the *Heath fabric* by **Thibaut**, shown in Straw, is woven using 100 percent recycled fibers (including wool, cotton and linen) from discarded garments.
- 19. **Aloka** swathed Edward Wormley's iconic *Long John bench* in an eye-catching antique patchwork quilt made from upcycled saris.
- 20. The delightfully bulbous *Vendor chair* from **Bobo Intriguing Objects** is comprised of hundreds of hand-sewn, foam-filled balls fashioned from vintage silk fabric swatches.
- 21. Each piece in **Loloi**'s customizable *Basketweave art collection* is hand-made from a medley of repurposed textile offcuts, guaranteeing that it's truly one-of-a-kind.

