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Book Report
Design for a Living World
By Abbott Miller

Design for a Living world makes us think about the products we use, where they come from, how they're made, and what impacts they have on our planet. The Nature Conservancy invited ten designers to make contemporary designs inspired by nature. They sent the designers around the world to create functional objects that represent and celebrate the natural surroundings. Their goals are to draw inspiration from the people, landscape and materials in its raw state. Through these designs we are challenged to see the impact and effect our consumption has on the environment and the people whose lives depend on that land.

Jewelry designer Ted Muehling visited Micronesia, Pohnpei to learn how the native people carve vegetable ivory. The local industry emerged around making the ivory into wind chimes, jewelry and other small objects. Muehling inspired by local craftsmen transformed the vegetable ivory into bracelets, necklaces and other items showing the beauty of these materials.

Stephen Burke went to Southwest Australia to meet with member of the Noongar Aboriginal group. They've lived there for thousands of years but their land was depleted by agricultural fields but the Gondwa Link project has helped restore the land. The raspberry jam tree is a native plant that is used in the daily life by the Noongar group. Burke was inspired by the dark, rich tones of the raspberry jam wood and he created a totem that collects and processes plant essences that are used for lotions, salves, and other therapeutic purposes. This totem is a prototype for the Noongars organic skin care products that they are trying to develop.

Yves Behar was sent to Costa Rica to look at the local traditions for harvesting, growing, and consuming cocoa. Farming organic cocoa requires a diverse habitat since the tree thrives in shade. Since 2005, cocoa has been produced in the Talamanca Mountains in La Amistad by seventy indigenous women who formed an organic chocolate cooperative. A local custom is making hot chocolate by shaping the cocoa into patties and shaving off flakes into cups of hot milk. Behar created a tool that is used to shave the cocoa patties and collect the shavings into the hollow tool that is then added to water or milk. His invention is the first step to a modest solution that celebrates the practice of making cocoa.

Abbott Miller traveled to Bolivia, Santa Cruz to study the use of fsc-certified plywood and how the local furniture industry is using these resources. Bolivian plywood is made from seven different types of trees and these forests are been threatened by shortsighted logging practices and private timber companies. The Bolivian Sustainability Forestry Protection II is a forest protection plan that trains local communities and businesses to sustainably extract from the forest. Miller created a chair by using one sheet of plywood and continuous bands of woven cotton webbing. He was inspired by their use of vernacular patterns, weaving traditions and CNC routing. Paulina Reyes also went to Bolivia for the Kate Spade Company. There she worked with carvers from the Bothers Guasase workshop and with women from the Association of Artisans of Galilea. She developed designs for handbags using local techniques and materials.

Fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi created an ensemble with matching shoes by using salmon skin that is turned into its own form of leather. In Alaska fisheries are working with

The Nature Conservancy to restore fish habitats and slow the effects of climate change. Salmon skin is a waste product of the salmon industry but Mizrahi transformed into a strong durable leather outfit.

Hella Jongerius, an experimental designer, traveled to the Mayan Forest to observe the harvesting and preparation of chicle. Members of the Veinte de Noviembre extract latex from trees and process it to make bricks to sell on the international market. She studied this material by melting, molding, shaping, and stretching the material. She used the elastic and adhesive properties of the chicle to use as decoration and adhesive on ceramic vases and pots.

Christine Meindertama worked with Panama sheep and lambs in Idaho at the Lava Lake Ranch. There she used their organic wool to create hand-knitted carpet. These sheep have diverse diets that require less fossil fuels to raise than other animals. They graze on land that is pesticide free.

Ezri Tarazi went to China to experiment with bamboo. He decided to create a domestic forest that can support types of living arrangements. He cut the hollow stocks to accommodate lighting fixtures, writing, speakers, a magazine rack, a wine holder and much more. He used the bamboo to become a function rather than a decoration.

Maya Lin created the Terra bench out of FSC-certified hardwood from a forest in Maine. Instead of using milled lumber or flat sheets to make a plane she put together slices of timber to create a wave like surface. She created this to highlight the beauty of the tree and the wave like surface reflects a portrait of its terrain.

All of these designers used their creativity and innovation to represent the local communities and areas that they visited. They used the nature around them and were considerate of its resources. Design for a Living used these designers to remind us all of our connections to the natural world and to remind us of the impact we can make on the world.