

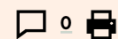
FINANCIAL TIMES

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From hairy furniture to silk lamps, sustainable design reigns at PAD London

Designers are repurposing and revaluing existing materials to protect the environment and promote social good

Susan Moore 7 HOURS AGO



When Fernando Laposse returned to the Mexican village he had known since his childhood to source maize leaves for a design project, he discovered that this staple corn was no longer growing in the mountains around Tonahuixtla. Years of industrial farming with chemicals, introduced to improve productivity, had resulted in devastating soil erosion. The place was a ghost town — most of its indigenous community had been obliged to find work in the US. Those who remained had, however, thanks to a small government grant, begun to reintroduce traditional, pre-Hispanic terracing and had planted 200-300 agaves.

This fleshy, spiky-leaved succulent was the only fast-growing desert plant able to cope with the climate and terrain and provide root systems to retain soil and water and act as a barrier against the wind. “There was no sustainable plan as to what would happen after the two-year funding stopped,” says the engagingly energetic London-based Laposse. “It was time to change my life.” That was 2015.

Now there are 80,000 agaves, and the hairy furniture he designs from sisal, the agaves’ fibre, is on show at this year’s PAD London fair in Berkeley Square (October 10-16). Sarah Myerscough Gallery presents Laposse’s black Sisal Pup, no less companionable or endearing than its golden canine counterparts, the fibres for this bench dyed with native indigo, zapote husks and cochineal.



The Revalued Foam Coffee Table 01 by Zavier Wong unites cheap foams and gold leaf © Courtesy the artist/Priveekollektie

This ingenuity extends to novel ways of re-engaging with the natural world. Feathers are the stock-in-trade of Julien Vermeulen, one of France's last *plumassiers*. This master craftsmen developed new techniques of dyeing, steaming, shaping and gluing recycled feathers which would otherwise be destroyed. His huge black wave-patterned wall panels exploit the material's nuance and texture and the play of light and shade across their surface (Maison Parisienne).



Studio T Sakhi's Reconciled Fragments side table © Courtesy the artists/Galerie Gosserez. Photo: Thierry Depagne



In 'BlackStone VIII', Julien Vermeulen uses feathers in waves © Courtesy the artist/Maison Parisienne