

November 2009 / Masters & 'Artivists'

EcoChic: Conservation & Awareness

The next generation of designers has the planet in mind. All of the concepts here have been developed by students or recent graduates. There are three main themes in this month's EcoChic feature: water conservation, waste maintenance (garbage, energy, space), ecology and nature. Also within these projects is a strong sense of community building and enhanced communication. Let the descriptions and images of these ideas inspire and educate!

Delta, the Way of Water: *Our water usage has risen during the last few years to an average of 126 liters per person per day. "That's because we no longer see water as something that's precious," argues Janina Loeve. "When we turn the tap on, it flushes straight away down the drain." Her washbasin with ceramic tap visualizes and extends the distance for the water to run away. Turn the knob and the water flows immediately underneath. As it then runs away more slowly, like a little river through the landscape, there is time to contemplate the value of water.*

Drinkfontein / Drinking Fountain: *This Drinkfontein, where you can fill your glass, creates a meeting place in a space. The design is a sustainably and aesthetically responsible alternative for plastic water coolers in offices and public spaces. The earthenware keeps the water cool without using electricity, and the water just comes from the tap. "The quality of tap water in the Netherlands is extremely good. I wanted to emphasize this by giving it a special place," explains Lizanne Dirx. She designed special glasses and a carafe for the fountain, each with rubber valves in the bottom. Place the glasses on one of the nipples and it fills itself with cool water.*

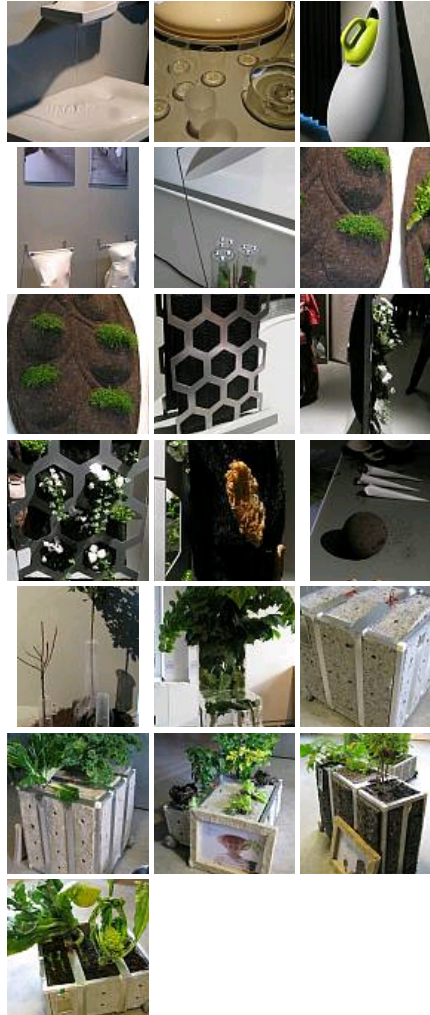
A Drop of Water: *Thousands of liters of water disappear via the rain pipe into the sewer during a rain shower. At the same time, an average household uses liters of drinking water to irrigate the garden. Bas van der Veer combined these two concepts in A Drop of Water: a rainwater butt with an integrated watering can. The light grey water butt is attached to the rain pipe, so during a rain shower the watering can is automatically filled. Once it is full, the rest of the water flows over into the water butt, so serving as a reservoir. "In this way, it is easier for the users to water their garden using rain water instead of drinking water from the tap."*

Wastesthetics: *Is it possible to elevate waste into a thing of beauty? Laura Lynn Jansen put plastic packaging items into a transparent bag, created a vacuum and discovered that it took on aesthetically attractive forms. This inspired her to make a garbage bag from a stretch material reminiscent of mother of pearl. "By being able to see the shapes inside, it becomes a kind of work of art that changes its form every day." The bag can be hung in a special frame. Jansen would like to have a weekly plastic collection day introduced on which everyone would hang the bag on their door. "A street with a shiny white shape on every house front. On the basis of the bag, you can say something about someone's identity – something from the inside is shown on the outside." She hopes that Wastesthetics will make people aware of how much garbage they produce.*

Wall Lungs: *Plants are the lungs of the house, the 'wall lungs' enhance the air quality and improve the acoustics. They are made from biodegradable felt that had been treated for dust mites. The plants grow on biological; cotton that has been finished with a watertight natural rubber.*

Road 'B: *Things are going badly for the bee population – colonies are disappearing fast. This is alarming, because the bee is a vital link in the pollination process. Fabian Riemer created a new habitat in which bees can buzz, pollinate and live in peace. Road 'B is a sound-damping wall and a bee paradise in one. A wall of metal honeycombs with a layer of sound-damping foam and an enormous bag of potting compost behind it. By cutting holes in the bag, flowering plants can be inserted that attract bees and other pollinating insects. At the back the bag is covered by a thick industrial cloth with a coarsely woven structure in which bees and butterflies can easily settle and establish themselves.*

Flowerbomb: *Flowers and plants scatter millions of little seeds each year in the city, each looking for a place to grow between paving stones and walls. To help spread more green in the city, Yoei Treffers*



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created www.flowerbomb.org. This website shows you how to make a projectile with plant seeds. Treffers devised five variants of these. Flowerbomb and Flowerexplosive: balls made of clay and wet earth that you plant by throwing. The Flowermine is a paper cone that you plant in flowerbeds. Flowerpowder consists of clay dust with flower seeds that you sow in holes between walls. By feeding birds and insects with Flowerbomber – tiny balls of bread with flower seeds – they spread the green for you.

Bioplastic Planter: Bas van der Veer believes in the future of biodegradable materials. "After use they serve as raw materials for the natural world." Van der Veer devised the Bioplastic Planter: a biodegradable container that makes the transport and planting of young trees easier. The Planter supports the tree after it has been planted, against the wind for example, and ensures that it does not have to be clamped by stakes and rubber bands. When the tree's roots begin to shoot, the Bioplastic Planter biodegrades under the influence of light, moisture and mould. The material then becomes feed for the tree. In this way, it automatically returns into the cycle of the natural world, and it serves the natural world rather than damaging it.

Growing Chair: The base structure of the 'growing chair' is formed by a fast growing willow. The young tree is planted together with a Russian vine in a miniature greenhouse in the shape of a chair. Once the tree is grown to its desired proportion, the greenhouse is removed and a chair can be harvested. Michael Bussien tries to emphasize that in a time of advanced technological possibilities we should not discard nature. In our evolution we should make use of what nature's complexity has to offer.

Cultural Roots: Today's world cities are experiencing demographic changes as local populations expand. This demographic change includes increasing cultural diversity in addition to a higher proportion of immigrants in certain urban areas. The presence of multi-ethnic groups often means that neighborhoods and communities develop a rich and diverse cultural identity. Forming and developing urban public spaces where different ethnic populations can live side by side and work together helps to build strong new communities.

So it is vital to set aside areas in the public space where activities can take place. Inviting citizens to participate in developing and reclaiming unused parts of the city will encourage social cohesion and dialogue between diverse groups in the community.

Unloved, left-over and transitional spaces have great potential for introducing inhabitants to new experiences. These locations can be places where people can come together to socialize, use the same space and eventually collaborate on a common goal.

I believe that design can play a role in exploring some of these urban spaces and can help to re-situate communication between groups and cultures in the urban public domain.



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