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INTRODUCTION

Antonia Edwards | www.upcyclist.co.uk

WHAT IS UPCYCLIST?

Upcyclist started in 2011 as a blog reporting on the finest examples of creative reuse. Its aim was to showcase the aesthetic possibilities that can occur when transforming something seemingly worthless into something of value. The website is a growing curated collection of projects that cross over into all spectra of the visual and decorative arts, including furniture, lighting, interior design, fine art, sculpture, architecture, fashion design and jewellery design. The *Upcyclist* school of thought encourages us to re-evaluate overlooked materials, objects and spaces in ways we never thought possible and proves that creative reuse knows no bounds.

UPCYCLIST AND UPCYCLING

The concept of upcycling was popularized by the books *UpCycling* by Gunter Pauli (1999) and *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things* by Michael Braungart and William McDonough (2002). The term was used to describe the practice of converting something disposable into something of greater use and value, preventing the waste of potentially useful materials by utilizing existing ones and lessening the need to use new raw materials. In contrast to recycling, upcycling does not require that the materials be broken down. Instead they are modified, altered, enhanced, combined and transformed into objects of a higher aesthetic or environmental value, either for the same function or a completely new one.

The principles underlying *Upcyclist* go hand in hand with ideas about mindful production and consumption. The chief aim of this book, however, is to draw attention to an aspect of upcycling that is too often overshadowed by its links to thriftiness and environmental concerns: that intelligent reuse is both an art form in its own right and a technique for creating objects of exceptional beauty.

Upcyclist celebrates makers who work with waste materials out of desire rather than obligation, because they best express an idea or lend something unique to a desired aesthetic. Their approach sits in opposition to quick-fix upcycling which, in spite of any intention to be environmentally friendly, can often lead to low-quality pieces that are likely to end up back in the waste

PREVIOUS SPREAD:

Nic Parnell, hat stand made from waste wood coated in nylon flock.

OPPOSITE:

Carolina Fontoura Alzaga, *CONNECT 28* 2014, chandelier made from bike chains.



WOOD



EL NEBOT DEL PERSIANER

Salvador Nadal Belda | Valencia, Spain

VENETIAN BLINDS > LIGHTING AND FURNITURE

Founded by Salvador Nadal Belda in 2012, El Nebot del Persianer ('nephew of the blinds maker') is a multidisciplinary design atelier focusing on interior design, product design and communication. With a passion for environmentally sound materials, Belda has developed a range of contemporary home products made from old Venetian blinds. The inspiration for the project came from Belda's uncle Lucas Sanz Belda, who had a career in making, hanging and repairing blinds for over 50 years. Belda explains, 'Initially, all blinds were hand-crafted from cane. Years later, they were made redundant as factories began to make shutters from wood. This inspired me to reuse the old blinds for another function. By utilizing these autochthonous materials, the project became a tribute to an object that had become characteristic of Mediterranean towns.'

Born out of a love of craftsmanship and with reference to a historical and cultural context, his contemporary lights made from blinds are designed to combine the traditions of the past with the hope of creating a sustainable future. With the help of Lucas, Belda

was able to make the most of first-hand knowledge of how the blinds were originally manufactured in order to upcycle them into something new. 'We use materials that are at our disposal not only for the benefit to the environment, but to create objects with soul,' says Belda. 'They are composed of materials that have surrounded us whilst we were growing up. Giving a second, functional life to an object is a beautiful concept and this is something new objects cannot compete with. Sustainable practice makes the most of materials that have already been used and doesn't rely on using more materials and energy to harness them. The product itself needs to be as environmentally friendly as the manufacturing process, since one without the other is useless. We not only like unique objects, we love the idea of reusing and extending the life of an object that can no longer serve its original function. Since childhood I have always loved objects that tell stories about how people lived long ago. I think we all have a fondness for the things in our daily lives that have been recovered from our roots and are reminiscent of times past.'

OPPOSITE:

Milano circular suspension lamp made of salvaged natural wooden blinds. The shade can also be painted in different colours.





ABOVE:

Adela suspended lamp and storage container and Maru work table. The table is made of solid oak coated with natural oils made from plant resins, with a recycled wooden-blind pocket for storing books, magazines and other objects.

Sant Antoni Street in Beldá's town of Aiello de Malferrit in Valencia. Old blinds are salvaged from the windows and doors of local houses when they need replacing.

OPPOSITE:

Tilu standing lamp, also available as a floor and suspended version. The lamp's graphic aesthetic is designed to create warm indirect light reminiscent of the sun that filters through the blinds during calm, summer, mid-afternoon siestas.





LES M&MDESIGNERS

Martin Lévêque and Mathieu Maingourd | Brussels, Belgium, and Nantes, France

WOODEN PALLETS > FURNITURE

Martin Lévêque and Mathieu Maingourd met at design school in Troyes, France, in 1999. Before creating Les M&Mdesigners, both had gained experience designing for the luxury market. Maingourd worked as a designer at Céline in Paris creating luxury eyewear and jewellery. In 2006 Lévêque embarked on a furniture and design collaboration with designer Xavier Lust.

Inspired by designers such as Gaetano Pesce, the Campana Brothers, Enzo Mari and Droog, Lévêque and Maingourd have a multidisciplinary approach to design. Social and environmental concerns are combined with an aesthetic simplicity and a philosophy that the limits of design can offer them a play area. Upcycling was something they had developed in their early days of design school, but their interest in the practice evolved further after they travelled to developing countries where they saw the many ways in which people are forced to be creative with the few resources they have.

Lévêque says, 'As upcyclists we work with recovery centres and associations, waste-collection sites and flea markets. We also get materials from companies and friends or simply find them on the street. With the wooden pallet projects, we selected the pieces that were the best fit for our concept and allowed us to tell a story before finding the simplest, clearest method of production.'

With issues such as rust, fragility, repair and renovation, reusing reclaimed materials doesn't come without its difficulties, but Lévêque and Maingourd have discovered many benefits. 'Reclaimed materials allow us to decrease production costs and make clever and conscious short cuts, such as reusing things that have been made using technical processes. Producing a plastic piece for a one-off project from scratch, for example, would be difficult and expensive and would have a negative impact on the environment. We like the idea of giving a second life to unwanted objects and putting them on the stage. It's interesting, fun and clever to use these objects in a different context. Materials distressed by time and their life cycle are also an expression of our culture,' he adds.

In addition to their interest in creative reuse, Lévêque and Maingourd are advocates of open-source production. In 2013 Lévêque created the collective *Libre Objet*, a website where designers submit instructions on how others can recreate their designs using the Free Art License. Maingourd explains, 'It is good to diffuse the process of production by allowing people to access DIY processes, as it lessens the impact on the environment. Upcycling and reuse are active movements in times of capitalist crisis but, beyond this, it is a fun and creative way to design. We support a system of production that shows a critically different positioning of thought in an ageing consumer world.'

OPPOSITE:
Charles Edouard armchair made from double-faced pallets. Inspired by the famous LC2 armchair by Le Corbusier.



TOP:

Outside In: Arbor table lamp in turquoise nylon flock finish.

BOTTOM:

Outside In: Mars Bark Arbor table lamp. The otherworldly, cratered surface comprises graphite, aluminium and an acrylic-based resin binder.



TOP:

La Noir Arbor table lamp. This special-edition lamp is made from wood that was found in a bog, rotten to the core. Once it had been dried and treated for fungus and wood-inhabiting insects, the wood was resinated to fossilize its features. Layers of epoxy resin were then applied to thicken and amplify its relief texture. It was finally sprayed using a polyurethane high-gloss piano finish lacquer.

BOTTOM:

Arbor floor lamp in electric-blue nylon flock finish. The fibrous surface absorbs more than 90 per cent of light, producing a striking pop of colour.



TEXTILES





ABOVE:
The original Kasuri rug and a reproduced version made from t-shirt factory excess. The rugs are woven with a braiding technique.

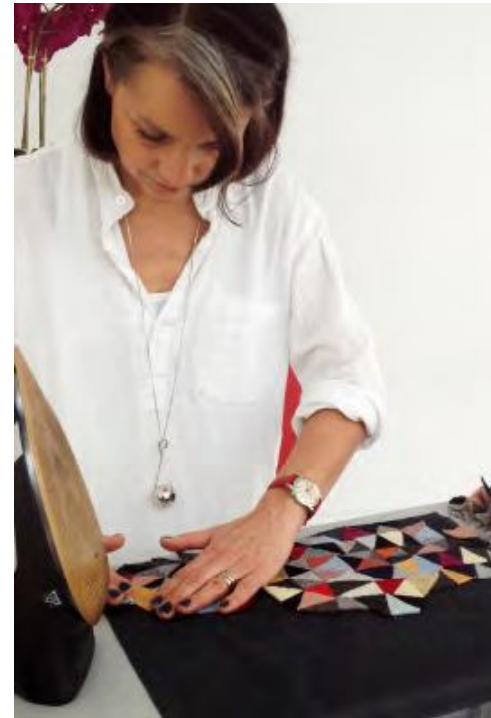
OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE:

Skadkanter woollen selvedges from a weaving factory in Latvia. Waste clothing is also sourced from the Salvation Army in Myrorna and from swap shops.

Detail of Aquarelle rug made from patchwork discarded woollen sweaters. The Kantha stitches are inspired by embroidery techniques seen in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Japan. The rug also employs a colour-blocking technique whereby each patch has its own composition made from sweaters in similar colour tones.

Detail of Re Orient, an oriental-style rug made of crocheted rags from discarded t-shirt material in red-orange tones. The rug is a symbiosis of the Swedish kilim and a crocheted granny blanket. The idea was to give value to a technique usually considered kitsch or low in status.

Brieditis making wall-to-wall Confettri carpet from woollen sweaters. The rug is made from lots of tiny cut triangles, some of which were waste from the first rug in the series. Tailor. The pattern is designed to resemble a marble floor.





ABOVE:
Collected sails at Pasai Donibane in Pasajes de San Juan, Gipuzkoa, Basque Country, Spain.

OPPOSITE:
Génois Cheslón loungers made from recovered sail fabric, lacing ropes and metal eyelet holes and filled with expanded polystyrene beads. This is a comfortable waterproof couch that adapts to the shape of the body. In sailing, genoa is the name given to the large triangular jib that overlaps the main sail and is often used in regatta cruises.

The Barlovento-Sotavento or 'windward-leeward' lounge and easy chair draw inspiration from the different sail positions required to navigate. Made from aluminium and sail fabric, the design permits dual use depending on how it is positioned.





Vintage leather belt walls made for a restaurant in Orange County, California. The flooring and wall panelling are a bespoke product designed for use in private and commercial spaces.



Ting's studios source most of their vintage belts from London, Paris and Los Angeles.

FACARO

Carolina Fontoura Alzaga | California, United States

USED BICYCLE CHAINS, RIMS AND COGS > CHANDELIERS

After initially studying painting and digital art in Denver, Colorado, since 2008 multidisciplinary artist Carolina Fontoura Alzaga has been developing *The CONNECT Series*: functional sculptures made from bike chains, rims and cogs that resemble elegant and meticulously handcrafted chandeliers. With materials sourced from abandoned bikes in junk yards and bike shop dumpsters in downtown LA, Alzaga transforms the discarded and industrial into something surprisingly delicate and luxurious.

The first chandelier was made at a time when Alzaga was heavily influenced by trash art and bike punk culture but was in fact the result of a semantic mistake. After seeing some kitchenware hanging from a makeshift pot rack made from an old bicycle rim, she was initially inspired to make a mobile from bicycle parts. Through trial and error, however, she mastered a technique that enabled her to create a cascading effect with all the elegance of a traditional Victorian chandelier, and so *The CONNECT Series* was born.

With all her chandeliers, Alzaga's biggest challenge lies in trying to approximate perfection with an imperfect material. The bike chains may appear as though they are naturally meant to be put together, but achieving their effortless quality requires dexterity. Alzaga has had to learn various techniques to find her way around the complex system of chains within each piece. 'To maintain the integrity of the concept, *The CONNECT Series* must solely be comprised of used bike parts. It is the rigidity and flexibility of the bike chains that determine how each piece is composed. In order to work in small spaces behind layers and layers of chains I've had to develop the ability to see with my fingertips,' she says.

Inspiration for Alzaga's work ranges from the wire sculptures of Japanese-American artist Ruth Asawa to the catenaries found in bridges, arches and architecture. Her work is also influenced by geometry, the mandalas of Hindu and Buddhist symbolism and the patterning and sequencing informed by rhythm in music. She says, 'Even when I was 16, whilst listening to 'Phoenix' by Daft Punk, I felt the urge to draw a musical notation of the song in my own symbols and patterns.'

She adds, 'Since childhood I've been struck by weathered textures that enable you to see the materialization of time. I'm attracted to the notion of making the invisible visible by imbuing it with value. I think utilizing reclaimed materials highlights the importance of ingenuity, reinvention, resourcefulness and the beauty of nuanced imperfection in a world that imposes standards of perfection and propagates disposability.'

Dedicated to finding creative solutions to excessive waste, *The CONNECT Series* is informed by principles of social and environmental sustainability. Alzaga says, 'A society that propagates planned obsolescence is doomed: it's short-sighted and ultimately suicidal. I hope that more people realize this and consider how they are contributing to either the solution or the problem, because you cannot be neutral. Movements are cyclical by nature and it may be that upcycling is one of many trends that come and go, but I expect the future will see more and more sophisticated upcycling propositions.'

OPPOSITE:

Caroline Fontoura Alzaga with *CONNECT 13*, 2012, for Eastside Genève store, Geneva, Switzerland.



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