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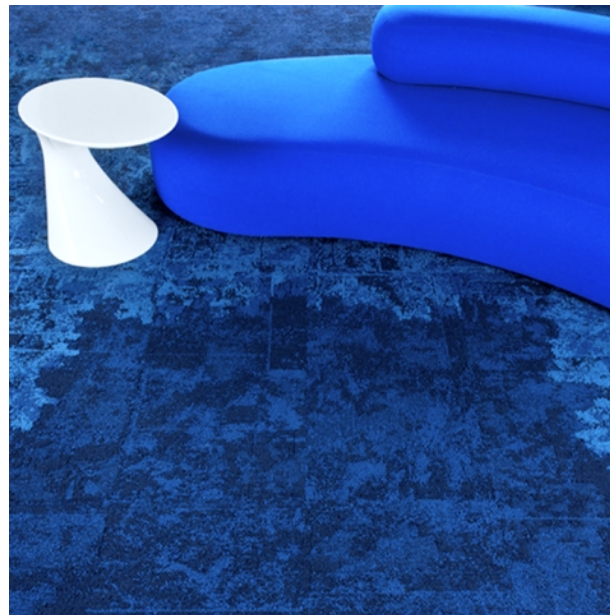
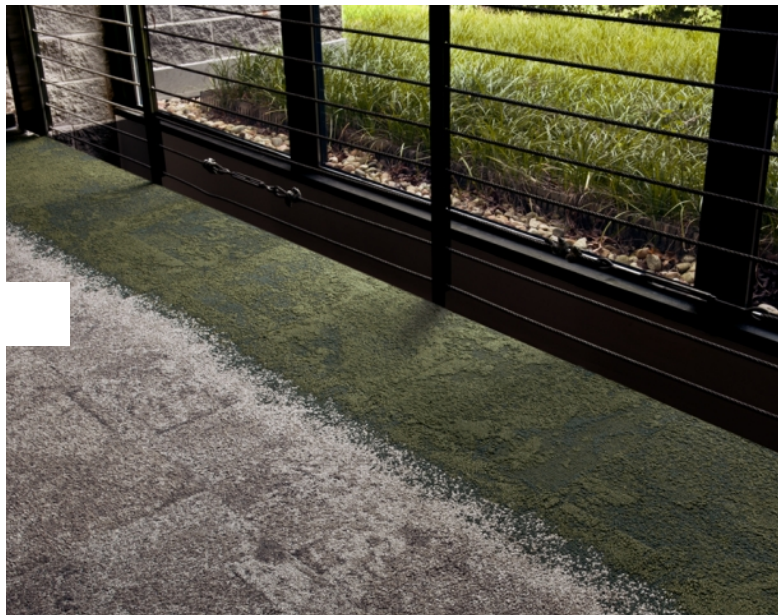
Guangzhou Pazhou 18-21 March 2017
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David Oakey translates biomimicry fascination into carpet innovation for Interface

'It was 20 years ago that Ray Anderson, founder of carpet tile manufacturer *Interface*, declared his company would be sustainable,' tells *David Oakey* when we meet in Rotterdam. 'And, as they were a client of ours, we had to change our ways too.' The announcement sparked Oakey's fascination for the natural design principle, which, after reading what he believes must be more than 100 books about green design, has become the core of his work.

While we discuss everything from employing 3D-printing to repurposing carbon dioxide, Oakey explains that when society wants to become more sustainable, our manufacturing methods and designs should not only *look* more natural, they should *be* like nature.

Over the years, we've seen more and more scientific companies – often founded by designers, artist and architects – appearing on the surface of design which grow their own materials, like a leather from bacteria. Why do you think that is?

David Oakey: Maybe because they are the dreamers of the world. They are focused on the future, constantly in search of something new and ways to push the boundaries. It's their free thinking that helps them to come up with innovative ideas.

Another relatively new breed are materials that almost act like organisms, either self-assembling, breathing or similar. How do you envision materials like these to influence design and interiors?

I feel that we are getting closer and closer to how nature designs and how natural

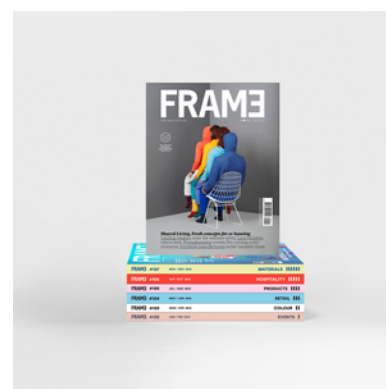
materials react. In nature, nothing is designed in angular rectangles. It's all very organic. Nature grows only the shape that it needs, there is no waste. Those are principles of how nature operates and we can learn from that. How can we create that chair, this table or these clothes using those same principles, without any

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waste at all?

Today everyone talks about 3D-printing technology. At the moment, most outcomes are still relatively small-scale, but you are starting to see bigger projects. I believe that's the future, because you can take one material – a polymer – and make whatever you need. And you can make it local, not ship things around. You could call it a quite natural system. Technology will help us get to a more natural system, a more natural world. Twenty years ago, the computer that I was designing from was huge and cost a quarter of a million dollars. My phone now, which is about 250 dollars, can do a thousand times more than that computer. It happened in such a short time.

What other developments have or are influencing the design scene?

The biggest change I think happened in the world is when we found fossil fuel in the 1800s. That changed our lives completely. Before that, we lived in harmony with the earth. We grew our food and sourced textiles for our clothing. Even our shelters came from nature. That changed when we found fuel, which was nature's deposit in a way. It filled our bank accounts and we could grow our food faster, using synthetics.

Now our population is outgrowing the carrying capacity of the world. We can't all live from the earth, so we need to do something else, take synthetics and make them work like natural materials. Keep them in the cycle. We have to design our synthetics to make them feel as soft to the touch as nature does. A lot of people think that I design wool carpets, but I don't. I started to calculate how many sheep you would need in the United States for the carpet industry. Every square foot of Georgia would have sheep in it, it's impractical.

When it comes to recent developments in material design, what inspires you?

Technology which brings the outside in. I have been thinking about this for a couple of years now. The outdoors changes from morning to night and I would like to see a space where maybe the light changes as you move to the space. We use air conditioning and heating to make spaces feel constant, but that doesn't meet my – or your – needs. I think that if it can vary, that would be a good thing.

As we travel more and more, we switch between time zones constantly. Could we use nature as an inspiration in designing aircraft cabins for example?

How does nature work? It doesn't travel all around the world, so maybe that's a good answer. Maybe we should start to stay local more. Maybe it's telling us we don't need to go around the world all the time. We have gone to this really global platform. We have the same things everywhere in the world, but there are trends of localisation, people wanting their own identity again. Even if we have a global company, why can't we stay local? This mindset – to make products only for certain areas – is already picked up in the fashion and automobile industries.

How is your vision reflected in your work?

We design carpets, so sometimes we have to get back to reality, but we still aim to send messages in our designs. A good example is our Net Effect collection for Interface, which was inspired by the ocean. We dump all kinds of plastics in the ocean. It's a big problem. And just when this was on my mind and I wanted to create a carpet, Interface started their Net-Works project. They began to collect discarded fishing nets which threaten sea life in small fishing villages in the Philippines and re-purposed the nylon yarns to create Interface floor tiles. It was a great project because yes it was a carpet, but it had a message too.

How is the consumer changing?

Consumers are increasingly looking into what things are made of and where they come from. People want to know what they are buying and who they are buying it from. What does the company stand for. It's such a powerful thing. The consumer is king. They can make you and they can break you. You've got to be a company that stands for something, be transparent. New generations care. There is also this new thing of two-way transparency. You want to know about the product and manufacturer, but they want to know about you too.

If you could come up with one new material, what would it be and what properties would it have?

I would say taking carbon dioxide out of the air and making products out of it comes pretty close to my ideal of turning bad stuff into something good. Global warming is big problem and it's caused by carbon dioxide, so if we can reuse it as a building material that's great. There are already designers working on this, turning carbon into plastics. It promises for great things to come.

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