



# profile



## Nature Trail

Although it is natural for journalists to fear and loathe any embargo, there always comes that rare and special moment when you realise that said embargo falls just perfectly for a deadline. What's more, it tends to only be the really good stuff that warrants such restrictions.

and that is exactly the case when it comes to Interface's exciting new product collection. Designed by David Oakey, founder of David Oakey Designs, the Human Nature collection is the forward thinking new global collection from the market leading company. As much as we don't normally like embargos, we do like a global collection launch.

Before we talk about Human Nature, however, we ask David to tell us a little bit about his own background. 'I'm originally English – even with this American accent,' David smiles. 'I was born in Worcestershire and studied carpet design in the 60's at Kidderminster College. I went to school with Robert Plant – he still hangs out in the town – and John Bonham lived around the corner. If I could have played an instrument or held a tune I probably wouldn't be here now!'

For our younger readers, Plant and Bonham were half of the mighty Led Zeppelin – but we digress.

'Carpet making was the local industry,' David continues, 'and if you worked in that industry you could make a lot of money. There were 60 or 70 carpet manufacturers in the area at that time. Sadly they're all gone now. Actually, my mother sent me a local newspaper where there was an article which said that a local government building in Kidderminster was specifying carpet from Interface. I started to think about it, and realised that Interface's carpet – the carpet square – was actually invented in Kidderminster. Ray Anderson started a joint-venture with a carpet manufacturing company over here to start his company in the United States. He bought this new technology of carpet squares from Kidderminster. The local companies didn't want to make it – they just ►

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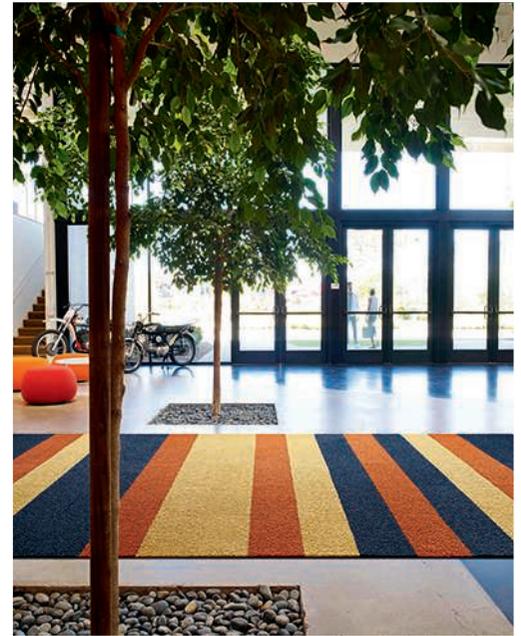
▶ wanted to make traditional carpet. They didn't want to see that change. When I look at it now I wonder why the industry didn't stay there and simply change. Today carpet tile is a \$4 billion industry globally – and the inspiration came from Kidderminster...and so did the designer!

When just 21 David moved to the United States and worked in the flooring industry for some 10 years, before starting to see another change in technology and trends. 'I was excited by the change – and so decided to start my own consulting business. Interface actually interviewed me three times – and they wouldn't hire me. Then, in 1994, they restructured, brought new management in – and the new management brought me in to design the new product.'

David has been the lead product designer for Interface Americas for the past 20 years,

and now leads global efforts in sustainable or 'smart' design, learning from nature, the study of Biomimicry. 'Interface has been my client now for 20 years but it is only in the last two years that I've started designing the European products,' David reveals. 'Interface were very local – they had their own designers in Europe and their own designers in the United States. They would share ideas – but they were pretty much separate. They were getting a lot of pressure from big corporations who wanted that same product in London, Shanghai and New York. So, as a company we had to start coming together and we had to start becoming global.'

'We are in that stage now where global trends have really taken over – and we have to be the same. Three years ago we decided to have one global launch – which was Urban Retreat.'



When Interface founder Ray Anderson declared his company would be sustainable and closed loop by 2020, Oakey and his team quickly identified sustainable design must be innovative, utilising efficient use of materials, seeking smart products and eliminating waste during the process. David is clearly passionate about following these steps to sustainability through process, product and people – and, particularly, by Biomimicry. 'We've started to see this trend of bringing nature into the city – things such as the High Line in New York, which is the most beautiful place to be,' David enthuses. 'I think in some of the newer buildings around the world are now bringing the nature in – just look at the new Norman Foster Apple building.'

'So we said, 'Let's be inspired by nature'. You never go out to the country or the park and say, 'That's an ugly green!' Everybody accepts nature. It does us good. So, with this in mind, we designed Urban Retreat – and it was successful all over the world.'

'For the next collection we looked at the problems we have with the oceans – and I didn't realise this myself. No matter what we do on land – taking, making, recycling – the ocean is our biggest problem. We're all connected to water – and this was the inspiration for last year's Net Effect collection. Actually, I met the people behind the NetWorks programme, I wasn't aware of their project in the Philippines – I was already working on Net Effect. That was a great ▶

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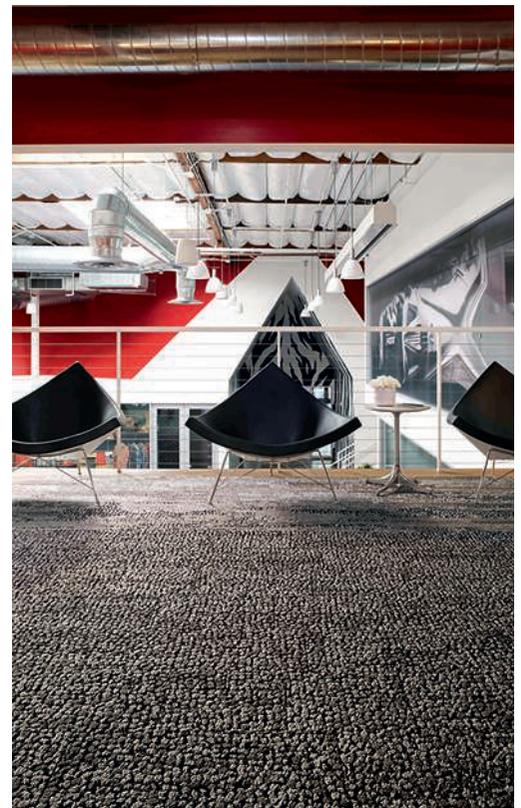
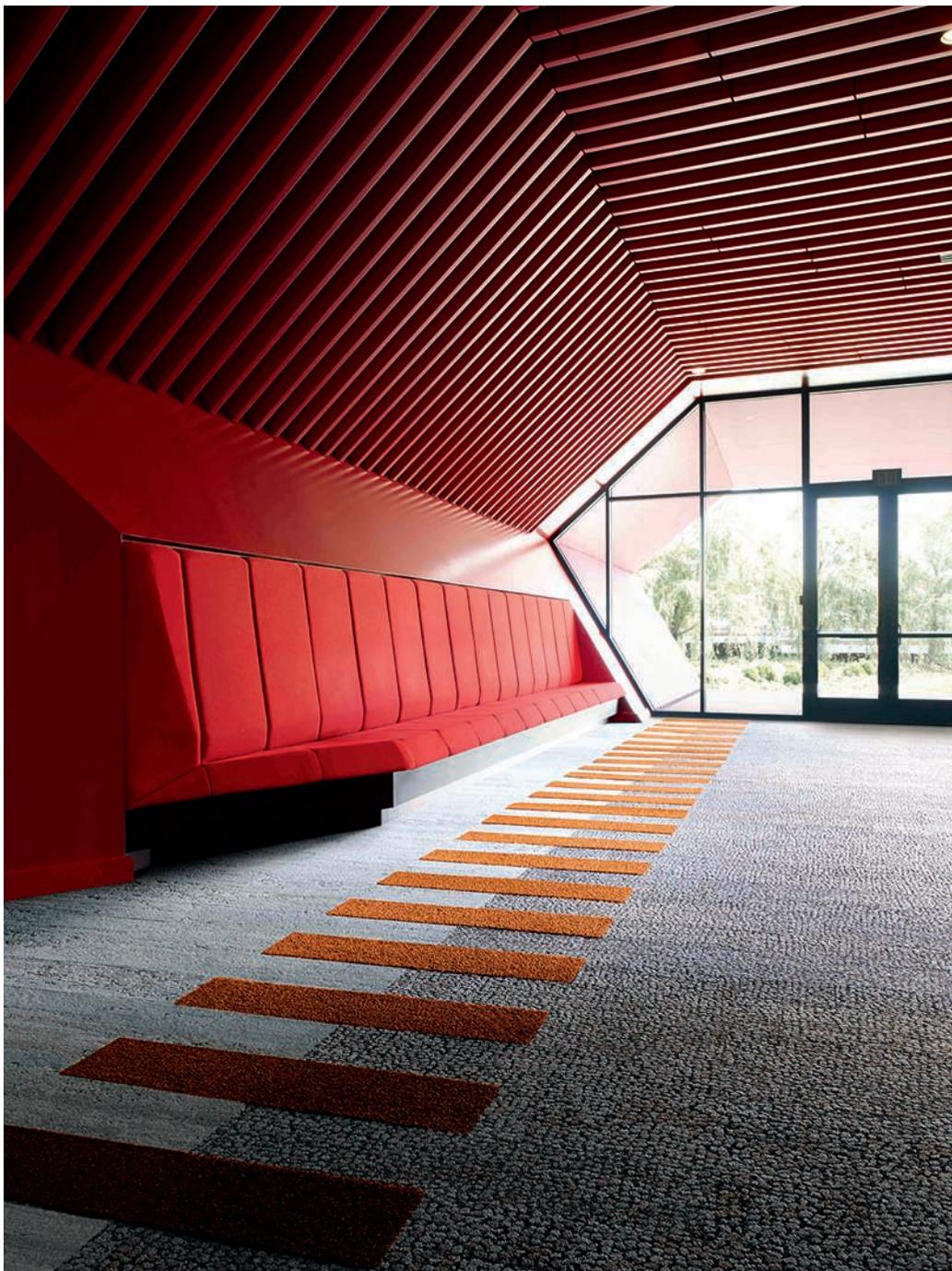
► coincidence and I think it gave us a great story to share alongside the product.

‘It’s always nice to have a story to tell people – but sometimes you need to do more. I think we’ve started to look at giving back – it’s more of a social thing. I think the NetWorks programme is incredible – by far the best thing that Interface has done to date.

‘This year we took another look at Urban Retreat – and we said, ‘This nature thing is not going away – it’s actually getting stronger!’ So I started to look at how man and nature

come together – not man controlling and commanding the space with concrete and glass and trying to keep nature away – or where nature is growing wild. This is where the two come together and connect; this is the inspiration behind Human Nature.’

David shows us through a number of the amazing images he has taken throughout his extensive travels – and admits to getting more than a couple of funny looks from passers-by as he took photographs of what we all consider to be the dull or mundane. ‘What we are now



starting to talk about is how would nature design an interior floor? Would it be concrete? Would it be flat wood? I think it would probably be incredibly diverse. So we’re now looking at what the surface should be – is it going to be hard or is it going to be soft – or is it going to be both of these?

‘This collection goes from a very low profile product through to a raised, soft carpet. This is a diversity we haven’t explored before – we’re starting to explore this thing about surface and what the right surface should be in an interior. If you look at nature, it will almost certainly be diverse. There are very few areas that are just hard rock or are just soft. We’re really starting to look at the texture here.

‘This all ties in to the idea of bringing nature indoors – not just plants, but also raw, natural materials. I hope people will look at this collection and be really creative with it.’

When not creating amazing carpet collections for interface, David also currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Biomimicry Institute, and is writing his biography – *The Green Magic Carpet Ride, a Journey through Creativity & Sustainability* with David Oakey – which is due for release this year.

He’s a fascinating man – and we’re sure that book will also be a fascinating read ●