



Innovation: designing for a sustainable future

Incorporating sustainability in product design.

Edwin Datschefski

For a design project it's really important to look at the product's life cycle and understand where the key environmental impacts are. They may not be where you expect and then take your ideas for improving those and follow them through. One of the biggest problems is that sustainable design often involves new materials and new processes and they can be hard to get hold of, hard to get hold of samples. You've got to be on top of the manufacturers' latest information and the latest trends, but that's all part of good design anyway. You've also got to think about usability and how a sustainable product will be perceived by customers and by users of the product, because if you are expecting customers who use your product to do something fundamentally different from what they do now, if it seems like more work, if they've got to pull handles, if they've got to put things in different bins, it can be difficult and confusing and they may not see the need, so it has to be fundamentally like any product, easy to use, really really functional and stylish and engages with the user. One thing I would love to see more of is to use the visual communication of sustainability to put these issues across to the consumer. That's a challenge.

I get many design students contacting me to say 'I want to work in a sustainable design company. I want to work for a manufacturer who produces sustainable products. And there aren't many of those around at the moment, but I think there will be in the future and I think you'll be well equipped for this but what we'll see is that every piece of design work is going to have a sustainable element built into it and it's going to be just a basic competency, the idea of sustainable literacy, something that all designers will have to deal with in partnership with the marketing people who are going to be selling the products that are made and the engineers who are going to be implementing and manufacturing those.