

ARA AT HOME IN HOWIES and building a Welsh network

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“Now that you can make anything, what is it that you want to make?”

Bruce Mau

I have this quote on my wall from Bruce Mau. It gets me thinking about the importance of design. And at the same, the finite resources we have left to us in this world.

Put those two thoughts together and you can understand why the role of the designer in the near future will have to take on a new set of responsibilities.

A designer will have to make something desirable, that remains a given. But they will also have to make something that will remain useful for its entire life as it was for its first life. A designer will have to learn to close the loop. To do that we have to rethink the way we make things.

A leading example of this design mindset is this chair. It's made by Designers right here in Wales. It's the first chair developed and manufactured in Europe to achieve Cradle to Cradle specifications.

The process all started from a desire within the company to go and find a better way to do things. The next step was to go and talk with Michael Braungart and EPFL - his groundbreaking organization based in Hanburg.

Then came the difficult part. Looking at each chemical ingredient of each material. This demanded their ability to recycle and to the environment. This is a challenge which materials could be successful in technical cycles of reuse.

What this means in simple recycling terms is a high quality material can go into high quality material. What most recycling currently means is a high quality material goes into a lower quality material.

This isn't really recycling, but 'down-cycling'.

Less bad is not the answer.

Next in the making of a chair is to design it so it can be taken apart. For example, the frame and the back are not glued together and so fasteners are used.

Instead a piece of innovative design means they simply click together. Then the arms were made so they could be separated easily. Even the base was made from just one material and not two like the rest of the industry.

The result of all this was a chair that is 98% recyclable. There is even a take back service to customers when the end of life of the chair has been reached.

The chair has already won awards, international recognition, and come one big step in a very competitive market.

So maybe the competition isn't sitting as comfortably as they once were.

orangebox.com

For those of you who don't know them already, howies are a Welsh clothing brand for cool young things (and not so young) who consider where and how they buy clothes.

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These guys make some tough choices about what goes into their products which are sustainably sourced and ethically manufactured, not an easy thing pull off in such a fiercely price driven industry.

The Orangebox development team love them because they have found a great mix between product, manufacturing and marketing. Their strong eco-tone is because they mean it, it's authentic and it works.

So when we wanted to get some t-shirts made to help publicise our 'no green bull' campaign, they were our obvious choice and only too happy to help. Sue's graphic design looks great and is now getting widespread exposure.

As a thank you for their generosity we packed up a few Ara's and headed off to their office in Cardigan, where we had a chance to meet with them and talk through the **Cradle to Cradle** thinking that we'd applied to Ara and ongoing Orangebox developments.

Like us, howies believe in the power of a good story and they were impressed enough by ours to make it a feature in the howies autumn catalogue, which means as much to us as any of the industry awards Ara has been collecting since its launch.

One thing has led to another and together with howies and we're now building a network of agile and exciting companies across Wales, all with a deep rooted sense of environmental responsibility and the drive to act accordingly. Long may it continue and please feel free to check out their great product at www.howies.com

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