

# VEGAN INTERIOR DESIGN

*Olga Alexandru* talks to experts in the industry

Planet-friendly, animal-friendly, human-friendly. These are the guiding principles of vegan interior design. While this also applies to veganism in general, the way this works within the interior design field is myriad. Firstly, it means not using any animal-derived materials such as fur, leather, silk, wool, down or beeswax. Secondly, it also means avoiding products that have been tested on animals.

Chloe Bullock, vegan interior designer and director of Materialise Interiors, notes that "There are many interpretations of sustainability and any animal use really is not sustainable from any angle. Apart from the likely cruelty, there are toxic chemicals, fossil fuels to grow feed, land and water use and methane to consider. Where animals are mistreated it's often the case that people in the supply chains are too." It's a no-brainer that vegan interior design is necessary for the future of our planet.

Some may wonder what else, besides the obvious materials, is not vegan in traditional design. For example, casein (a milk protein) can be hidden in paint. Other little-known animal products which can crop up in interior design include cochineal (insects that are used for red colouring), shellac (a resin from the female lac beetle) and ox gall (a material from cows). There are also some glues and coatings that can be used in a variety of interior design contexts that are not vegan – but finding out whether a particular product is suitable for vegans can be tricky.

## Biofabrication

So how is vegan interior design addressing these problems? What innovations are happening that mean we can choose vegan every time? A relatively new manufacturing process called 'biofabrication' may be the solution. This involves creating fabrics and textiles out of cells, proteins and other living materials. We are seeing leathers made from mushroom and pineapple, recycled plastics turned into textiles and trees into duvets as well as bedding made from pulped eucalyptus trees, bamboo fibres and organic buckwheat. Other textiles are made from cactus, apples, fruit waste, algae and collagen to name a few.

Sometimes, though, going back to basics is best. Eleanor Fausing of Eleanor Fausing Luxury Interior Fabrics, has focused on linen as her main material for a great reason. She says, "I have chosen to print on 100% linen to ensure that my



fabrics are as sustainable as possible and durable enough to last a long time." She has also taken care to be eco-friendly in the production of her fabrics, using digital printing and pigment colour which reduces ink and landfill waste and uses less water.

**Reduce, reuse, recycle**

Of course, one way to be more eco-conscious is not to buy new products at all. Martin Gerhad of Boostology, an eco-friendly gift marketplace, agrees: "Don't buy new all the time – give your local charity shop or car boot sale a visit, and pick up something pre-loved. You'll walk away with a bargain and feel good about it too!"

If you are going to buy new, Gerhad suggests you "Look for products that are reusable or are made to last, so you're reducing the amount you're buying". Chloe Bullock goes a step further: "Recyclable isn't enough. Just addressing packaging is not enough. Vote with your wallet by rewarding those who think about a product further along its life in the design". She asks consumers to consider: "Is it great quality that will retain value? Is it safely compostable? Is it easy to disassemble at the end of life? Consider its reparability."

**Ask questions**

Eleanor Fausing cautions against potential greenwashing. She says, "Buying vegan does not necessarily mean buying eco-friendly as other vegan materials, such as polyester or nylon, are derived from non-renewable resources and can have a significant environmental impact during production."

How can consumers navigate this minefield and ensure that their products are not only vegan, but also eco-

friendly and sustainable for the planet? The answer is to ask questions. Emma Hooton, founder and director of Studio Hooton, encourages customers to email businesses to ask about their vegan and eco credentials. It's what she does with her own suppliers. "To start questioning suppliers is a relatively new concept in the interiors industry," she says. She adds that the interiors industry is slightly slower to improve than the fashion industry, for example, but that change is happening and it's being driven by customers.



Camilla Parmigiani, international agent for the Vegan Trademark, agrees. "For interior design it seems that there is less understanding of the importance to improve materials and practices."

It's getting better, she muses, but the leaders are still in the food and cosmetics industries when it comes to understanding labelling and certification.

**Use your power**

Gerhad is taking note of what his customers want. He's noticed an interest in how the products are delivered. "We don't use plastic protective packaging such as bubble wrap and plastic tape in our parcels, as we know this is something our customers frown upon," he mentions.

Customers drive businesses and drive change in businesses so it's up to every individual to ask questions and put pressure on companies that aren't doing more. The future is quite literally at our fingertips. Email companies. Tweet at businesses. Use your power. The more of us who demand better, the more affordable the vegan and ethical options will become.

Parmigiani puts it best: "These companies don't have money to waste. So if they're investing in this, it's because they want to satisfy this new emerging attention of a customer."



*Customers drive change in businesses so it's up to us to ask questions.*



**CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2023 LONDON MARATHON RUNNER!**

Our wonderful supporter Matthew Fordham raised an incredible £1275 for The Vegan Society by running the London marathon. Fundraising Assistant Theresa Murphy asked him a few questions about his experience.

**Did you feel supported by the society as you prepped for the big day?**

Incredibly. I couldn't believe what was accomplished and it gave me the drive to keep going out when it would have been so easy to skip training runs.

I would absolutely recommend others to get involved with fundraising for The Vegan Society. I feel like I am a small part of something incredible and would jump at the chance to do it again.

**As a previous marathon runner, how did this experience differ as you were doing it for charity this time?**

When the tough times hit, I thought about why I was doing it and the people that had invested in me. It drove me beyond what I thought was possible.

Feeling inspired? Please email us at [fundraising@vegansociety.com](mailto:fundraising@vegansociety.com) or call 0121 507 9987 to learn how we can support you in your challenge event.



**Finishing a marathon is always a huge accomplishment, but indulge us – what time did you get?**

I wasn't after a particular time but around 22 miles it was looking like I might have achieved a 3:45, which would have been amazing. However, my knee decided it had had enough and popped. I stopped to stretch it out then hobbled for a few minutes, but the crowds were so incredibly supportive – calling out for me by name (I had my name printed on my Vegan Society vest) – so I staggered to the finish. For the final few hundred meters, I was overcome with emotion, crying and hyperventilating as I crossed the line. I have never experienced anything like it before. Incredible. The official time was 4:09:23.