

Press Release 08/2022

Groundbreaking Wilkhahn Chairs with Renewable Seat Upholstery at Floriade 2022

Wilkhahn joined forces with Airbus in Hamburg and Munich, as well as a start-up called Mycelium Materials Europe, to conduct basic research. The goal is to replace petroleum-based upholstery and cover fabrics with renewable ones made of mycelium. Floriade 2022 in Almere, the Netherlands, is now showing Wilkhahn chairs for the first time that are upholstered with the promising organic foam.

Bad Mnder, Almere (NL), August 2022. North German company Wilkhahn has been actively involved in bringing about an ecological change in the office furniture industry for over 30 years. Back in 1991, it was the first manufacturer worldwide to launch an ecological design concept. This approach involves embracing a circular economy during the development of its durable and high-quality seating and tables. The company won the German Environmental Award in 1996 and has repeatedly become involved in basic research into new materials in order to sponsor projects and build on its own expertise in this area too.



The showcase in Floriade's Natural Pavilion with upholstery on a Wilkhahn chair and a wall lined with mycelium. Image SIGN

Fungi as furniture upholstery and foam

The Sustainable Upholstered Furniture research project was initiated in the Dutch foundation SIGN's Livinglab Bleiswijk and sponsored by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. SIGN's projects focus on using garden and organic waste to grow mycelium for various applications. This fungus is a mass of thread-like cells that form the fast-growing root-like structures under the soil. Producing mycelium only leaves a very small carbon footprint and the fungus is biodegradable. It's also lightweight, fireproof, absorbs sound, and has insulating and antibacterial properties. All these aspects mean the material has huge potential for aircraft construction (seats and partitions) and upholstered furniture.



To start with, the mycelium materials were compared with other renewable materials. Image Laila Kestem



Showcase of a Wilkhahn chair with mycelium upholstery in the Tiny House at Floriade. Image Laila Kestem

Third project phase with showcase at Floriade 2022 in Almere

The first project phase involved research into the basics of mycelium materials compared with other renewable upholstery materials and thorough testing of the first mycelium-based textiles produced. The second phase was all about exploring possible production models and processes in terms of reconditioning upholstered furniture with mycelium or producing upholstery from scratch. The third project phase examined using mycelium to upcycle used Wilkhahn chair models. Visitors can now see the exhibits at Floriade 2022 on the 2nd floor of the Natural Pavilion and in the Tiny House, plot 80. The largest international horticultural exhibition only takes place once a decade. This year, the site was

Wilkhahn

designed by the famous, Dutch MVRDV architectural firm under the banner of Growing Green Cities.

Michael Englisch, head of design and development at Wilkhahn, emphasizes the importance of these types of research project: “We’ll continue to monitor these developments closely and make use of the opportunities presented wherever possible. Developing sustainable materials is pivotal to the way we develop in future in general.” Wilkhahn’s part of this project because it wants to help make these types of material developments available for industrial applications in the future.

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