

'Seed to Seat' hardwood design project launches in South Africa

Seven South African designers are working with American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), to design a 'Seed to Seat' project at 100% Design South Africa 2017.



The 'something to sit on' pieces, which will be made from a selection of four American hardwood species - American cherry, tulipwood, soft maple or red oak - will be unveiled at 100% Design South Africa 2017, running from 9-13 August in Johannesburg.

The announcement follows kick off meetings held with the designers in Johannesburg and Cape Town earlier this month.

The furniture design and life cycle assessment project aims to throw the spotlight on versatile, yet less well-known American hardwood species and identify the environmental impact of design. According to Roderick Wiles, AHEC regional director, the word sustainable has almost become design rhetoric. Whilst many well-intentioned designers claim sustainability in their approach to their work, there is often little solid evidence to support them in making those claims.

Andrew Dominic (Andrew Dominic Furniture), James Mudge (James Mudge Furniture Studio), Laurie Wiid van Heerden (Wiid Design), Christoph Karl (Guideline Manufacturing), Jacques Cronje (Jacques Cronje Timber Design), David Krynauw (David Krynauw) and Adriaan Hugo (Dokter and Misses) are collaborating with AHEC to demonstrate that sustainability can have substance.



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Ilse van den Berg 1 Mar 2017



Tracking environmental impact

During the manufacturing process and incorporating data from AHEC's LCA research for 19 American hardwood species, all materials, energy usage, transport and wastage will be recorded to assess the full environmental impact for each design. Life cycle assessment is a scientific tool that helps industry to establish environmental frameworks that have real meaning and assess true sustainability. The result will present the cradle-to-factory grave impact of creating each product across six categories. The most topical impact category is global warming potential (GWP), or carbon footprint.

“We are excited, not only by the calibre of the designers involved in this project, but also by the pieces that we look forward to seeing in these versatile, yet less well-known American hardwood species. We have seen for a long time that South Africa has a commitment to sustainable design in principle and, through this project, we can demonstrate what that means in reality - an opportunity for us to show, and learn, what works and what design elements make a difference to the environment,” said Wiles.

“In addition, we have also developed a microsite for the project, which is now live at www.seedtoseat.info. This will be the hub for all information regarding the project and will include details regarding the designers.”



Following international trends

The launch of ‘Seed to Seat’ South Africa builds on prior initiatives in the Middle East, Australia and Europe, which have aimed at creatively promoting American hardwoods, and involved Zaha Hadid, David Adjaye, Matteo Thun, Sou Fujimoto, Norman Foster and Paul Smith amongst others.

The project in South Africa is the second phase of ‘Seed to Seat’, which was initially launched in Australia and New Zealand earlier this year. AHEC worked with six designers, who were given the same open brief, and their designs were on display at DENFAIR, which took place in Melbourne from 2-4 June.

In line with its ‘Grown in Seconds’ campaign, AHEC also calculated how many seconds it would take for the wood used to make the individual pieces to regrow naturally in the US hardwood forest. For the six designs in Australia and New Zealand, AHEC calculated that it would take a mere 2.2 seconds for all the wood used to grow in the US hardwood forest. Looking ahead, the plan is to calculate the same for the seven designs in South Africa as well.

“Seed to Seat aims to introduce the designers to American hardwood species, which are less widely-specified in their

markets, while challenging them to design a seat using only solid lumber and as little non-wood materials as possible. This ambitious project involving American hardwoods and environmental profiling will be the first of its kind in South Africa and the initial response to it from the designers involved has been overwhelmingly positive.

“We hope that the project will prove to be a great learning experience and an opportunity for the designers to test new designs in new species. In addition, we are thankful to Rare Woods SA, who will be donating all of the timber required for the project,” concluded Wiles.

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