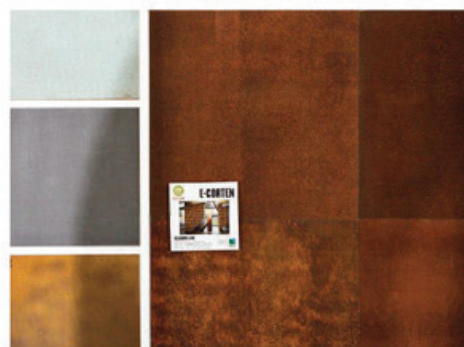


[DESIGN]
TRENDS



MATERIAL WORLD

A BARRIO LOGAN DESIGN FIRM
READIES FOR GLOBAL DOMINANCE.

By Seth Combs
Photography by Robert Benson

If they build it, they will come.

And that's exactly what the design-conscience set is starting to do. Whether it's Microsoft in Seattle or H&M in Sweden, they're seeking out San Diego's Noble Environmental Technologies and its potentially revolutionary material ECOR (ecorusa.com). The eco-friendly medium is made from post-consumer, cellulose-based fiber (read: most organic trash), with those fibers sticking together naturally to create an extremely durable and lightweight material.

"Whenever someone I'm just meeting asks me what I do, I ask them how much time they have," jokes Head Designer Matt Arrigo. "I tell them I work in technology. Yes, we work in building materials and we make cool products, but we don't get stuck on that."

In their bustling Barrio Logan space that serves as both the firm's headquarters and factory (they also have a larger one in Serbia), they're taking calls from

Dubai, followed by a board meeting that includes a former IKEA CEO. Everyone wants to talk about ECOR, which was first conceived decades ago by President and CEO Robert Noble in a government laboratory. When the technology was fully developed, he quit his job at local powerhouse firm Tucker Sadler Architects (the firm behind, ahem, the new Central Library) to devote himself full-time to ECOR.

He's used it to create an eye-catching line of sustainable products, from oh-so-hip eye glass frames and rustic-looking bowls to eco-carriers for hipster moonshine and hangars for TOMS shoes. El Cajon-based Taylor Guitars is giving them the wood cutoffs from guitars that would otherwise be trashed so that NET can turn them into an eco-chic guitar case.

Still, the products seem to be just a means to an end when it comes to getting the word out about NET's universal construction panel. The real mission? They want those ECOR panels to be the

DOUBLE VISION Clockwise from left: Designers Julian Quintoas and Matt Arrigo at Noble Environmental Technologies' Barrio Logan HQ; a mod chair; the versatile, eco-friendly material comes in several finishes.



FINISHING TOUCH From top: Artful bowls made from ECOR feature a variety of finishes that resemble metal; hangers for TOMS shoes.



“When Microsoft wanted a lightweight, stage for its partner conference or when Fox needed a sustainable set for the sitcom *Raising Hope*, both were sold on ECOR technology.”

...CONTINUED future of eco-friendly design.

“One of our investors likes to say that we do wood, only better,” says designer Julian Quintaes, whose work for NET focuses more on urban planning.

Companies are now seeking them out. When Microsoft wanted a lightweight stage for its partner conference or when Fox needed a sustainable set for the sitcom *Raising Hope*, both were sold on ECOR technology. Even superstar architect Frank Gehry has some ECOR in his office.

Arrigo sites NET’s recent work with H&M as his favorite project so far:



They built what he calls a “green store pop-up” in Hamburg, Germany, for the fashion retail giant.

“We had to do it in less than a month,” says Arrigo. “We were so busy. I probably slept on a few ECOR panels during the build-out.”

Next up? Well, let’s just say Noble himself has, well, noble intentions. “We want to solve the low-cost housing crisis,” says Noble. “We’ve picked a really high mountain to climb, but I have this wild notion that my team and I will get it done in 10 to 15 years.”

How so?

“We want ECOR factories everywhere. Large and small,” says Noble. “Worldwide.”

BY THE NUMBERS

ECOR Values

The ECOR story in fact and figures

0

The number of trees needed to make the material

1986

The year Robert Noble began to experiment with cellulose-based fiber building materials

140K

The potential number of ECOR custom guitar cases produced for Taylor Guitars

1,000

The number of hangers the firm produces daily for TOMS shoes

10

The number of countries where ECOR has been sold

NOBLE EXPERIMENT CEO Robert Noble sports a pair of glasses made from ECOR, which he dreamt up.

