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Reducing Footprints – From Fabrics to Flooring

The market for environmentally improved products continues to grow and expand. The choice for designers and specifiers is better than it has ever been. The quality and environmental performance of certain products is at an unprecedented level, especially in relation to commercial textiles, floor coverings and office furniture.

Australian manufacturers, as well as global producers, are going to great lengths to design, innovate and out-compete each other on environmental grounds. Some of these product achievements are genuine, meaningful and measurable, some of them are 'fin' and questionable, while most are somewhere in between. Overall it is a wonderful sight and shows what is possible when the correct programs and incentives are established to help drive a greener future.

The reality is that many projects, fit-outs and clients are being won and lost on environmental performance. Few can argue that sustainability has not become an essential part of the competitive landscape with most large-scale building and fit-out projects.

Suppliers of textiles and floor coverings have been some of the most proactive players, both in terms of product choice, marketing collateral and hypebole. Two noteworthy companies outlined below – INSTYLE Contract Textiles and InterfaceFLOR – have maintained a consistent and comprehensive approach to product sustainability for several years. Their latest initiatives and achievements are discussed below.

INSTYLE CONTRACT TEXTILES

INSTYLE is a textiles supplier that deserves clear recognition for its commitment and action on developing eco-improved fabrics and services for the commercial market. Not only have they been one of the long-haul textiles companies when it comes to sustainability, their efforts have also been acknowledged with a suite of high profile environmental awards and commendations.

Whether it is about products, programs, policies or customer services, INSTYLE are demonstrating what is possible when product oriented environmental performance and impact reduction are taken seriously and resourced accordingly. INSTYLE go beyond supplying a handful of eco-improved lines. They have a comprehensive program that aims to address a diverse range of life-cycle environmental impacts. INSTYLE's focus is often on the environmental benefits and value of wool-based fabrics as opposed to synthetic textiles.

What's appealing about INSTYLE's approach to sustainable textiles is the passion and fervour they demonstrate. This is being reflected and rewarded through some major environmental awards. Since 2006 they have gathered a suite of noteworthy awards, commendations and acknowledgements including:

- 2008 Sustainability Green Globe Awards. INSTYLE won three separate awards under the NSW Government's Green Globe program, covering the Premier's Sustainability Excellence Award, the Industry Environmental Sustainability Award, and the Small Business Environmental Sustainability Award.
- 2008 Business Sustainability Award for Environmental Best Practice Program under the United Nations Association of Australia, World Environment Day Awards
- 2007 Banksia Awards – Finalist in the Sustainability Category for outstanding achievements in minimising the environmental footprint of a company.
- 2006 Banksia Awards – Finalist in the Sustainability Category for outstanding achievements in minimising the environmental footprint of a company.

In addition to awards and industry and government recognition, INSTYLE have also been working on broader environmental and ethical issues that transcend the usual eco-branding and marketing hype, be it certified or otherwise. INSTYLE have signed an agreement contracting ethical types and environmental objectives in relation to wool supply.

This will involve textiles made using wool from a breed of Merino sheep that do not require 'mulesing'. According to the INSTYLE web site, "Australia's long history of mulesing on sheep farms has led several major international fabric designers and manufacturers to boycott locally-produced wool. The boycott was led by the animal rights group PETA, which maintains its stance on mulesing as an outdated and inhumane practice."

Dr Jim Watts – a former CSIRO scientist – engineered the Merino breed to have softer, more flexible skin that has less wrinkles and folds, known as SPS sheep for their Soft-Rolling-Skin. INSTYLE notes that the absence of skin congenitors ensures the animals are not at risk of developing flystrike and therefore do not need to be mulesed like the traditional, more-wrinkled Merino breeds. INSTYLE's Managing Director, Michael Fitzsimons is committed to the product and the process stating their position very clearly: "We strongly endorse the cessation of mulesing and we are confident of the support of the professional design industry and consumers alike."

INSTYLE will release its new Ethico™ non-mulesed wool product in upholstery and screen fabrics as part of its Sustainable LIFE textiles Collection - LIFE is an acronym for 'Low Impact For the Environment'.

Instyle Contract Textiles
01 21 9317 0222 instyle.com.au

Contemporary Leathers
Speaking of ethics and high environmental standards, INSTYLE's sister company – Contemporary Leathers – continues to highlight the value of leathers with improved environmental performance, especially as a result of embodied cleaner production techniques and low toxicity e.g. chrome-free production.

Contemporary Leathers supply Elmo Leathers into the Australian market and much of the information and marketing has centred around Elmo's exceptional environmental initiatives and ability to process and produce leather in a way which minimises the use of toxic and/or hazardous substances. Indeed, Elmo won a European Union LIFE Environmental Award specifically for its wastewater treatment plant. Information from Contemporary Leathers reports that the Swedish tannery has used innovative technologies to dramatically reduce nitrogen in its wastewater, as well making significant cuts in Biochemical Oxygen Demand and Chromium.

Elmo makes no half-hearted statement about how green and clean the production processes actually are, seeing themselves as the "world's cleanest tannery". Strong words from a company with angle



01 'Galato' on wall, 'Sanna' on chairs. Contemporary Leathers
02 Dr Jim Watts, scientist who developed new SPS sheep with flexible skin. Michael Fitzsimons, Zambesi leather on Amfor chair. Contemporary Leathers

