

PENTA

Good Company: Model No.'s Locally Produced, Upcycled Furniture



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There are sustainable furniture brands, and then there's Model No., a company founded in Oakland in 2018, which brings nontoxic products into wellness-focused homes.

Over the past few years, the company has produced custom 3-D-printed furniture from upcycled food waste. Model No. "believes in the future of tech to automate traditional industries," says the company's CEO, Phillip Raub, who joined the company in 2020, adding that co-founders Jeffrey McGrew and Jillian Northrup asked " 'How can we change this industry?'"

Model Co. uses locally sourced materials, like plant-based resins from unused food crops, at their made-to-order Oakland factor. It also has smaller factories across the country, which produce furniture products locally. The goal is to eliminate order wait times as the recent supply chain disruptions and clogged ports.

Raub saw an opportunity to push the firm forward, beyond its 3-D reputation. Over the past year, he has led change at the company, from chairs to couches, all with an eye on sustainability, locally produced products, and turning upcycled plants into furniture.

“The ethos of our organization and in the thread everything we do is around being as efficient and sustainable as possible,” Raub says. “We try to reduce our carbon footprint.”

THE ITEM

The brand recently launched the Platform Series, which includes a coffee table, chair, ottoman, and sofa. The sofa is made of a plant-based resin made from agricultural waste (corn husks, cassava, sugar beet), which are combined with certified, sustainable hardwoods.

The brand wanted to create an environmentally friendly couch with no off gassing-related products in its production. The pieces are made from locally sourced natural wood, while the cushions are made only from latex, rubber trees, and feathers. “We start with 100% wool,” Raub says. “We wanted to start with a 100% natural product on the market.”



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Model No.

THE PRICE

Coffee tables range from US\$720 to US\$1,630, while side tables range from US\$350 to US\$520. The chairs and lounges start from US\$1,500 to US\$2,080. The couches in the Platform series range from US\$7,000 to US\$20,000.

The company uses 100% recycled materials for their products and packaging. “We don’t use recycled plastics in our products, not even ocean plastic,” Raub says. “We always make sure there’s a consciousness behind it.”

“Because we’re a venture backed company, we don’t have to make hefty margins, we think that will cover time with greater efficiency,” he adds. “It’s hard to make good quality products out of natural materials that are economically reasonable in this day and age.”

WHAT’S THE GOOD?

Model No.’s agricultural waste is sourced from a company called Nature Works LLC, which takes beetroot-dense vegetables (“which animals can’t even digest, because it’s too coarse,” Raub explains), and turns it into a non-petroleum based plastic pellet.”

The pellets are shipped to the company raw from places like Iowa and Indiana and can be ordered in different colors. “You can create by mixing sawdust, it gives more of a natural texture,” he says. “Those pellets go through an extruder, like squeezing out cake icing, that’s going around through a computer-generated design based on coordinates into the software. That’s how you get cool shapes and sizes for the product.”

The brand also uses Forest Stewardship Council, or FSC, certified wood for the products, and they work with small farms, as well, including cherry wood for outdoor furniture and walnuts for indoor tables as part of the Platform Series, all of which are locally sourced.

In each of their micro-factories, the brand uses cutting-edge technologies to minimize toxic byproducts and harmful materials used in traditional furniture production. For example, mass produced furniture uses wood fibers instead of wood, and many upholstered cushions are laden with toxic materials.

“Most people don’t realize they’re not getting solid wood in most furniture,” says Raub. “We’re starting to see plant-based things but that’s not so often in furniture, it’s still mostly plastic.”



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WHAT'S NEXT

Looking toward the future, the brand plans to get into lighting design. It’s also opening a pop-up showroom in Berkeley, Calif., this year. They’re looking to expand to various retail showrooms.

Model No. is also looking to lower its environmental impact by creating micro-factories across the country to produce and finish furniture within 60 miles from where it’s being shipped.

“The plan is to make sure we make furniture as close to the consumer as possible,” Raub says. “By fulfilling and producing a product close to the source, it eliminates distribution centers. Micro-factories are going to be the future of not only furniture, but manufacturing, in general. It’s going to cut down on lead times and create greater efficiency.”