

about ashortwalk

An interview by Sarah Conway

To describe Daniel Dicker, founder of ashortwalk product design company as an innovator would be a disservice. As we speak, Dan pulls samples of otherworldly materials from drawers, email contacts from his inbox and shares sketches of products that refuse to accept any preconceptions of material and function.

Having left his job as Designer and Inventor at Dyson in 2003, Dan developed ashortwalk from a desire, 'to create products from recycled materials, in the UK, a short walk from the sea.' To Dan, 'waste' materials are both a challenge and an opportunity. 'Old plastic plant pots, for example' he says, 'are not collected. They have no value. They are light, but shipping is expensive; they are just not viable for recycling. But, if you create a product that uses them... well now it is financially viable to recycle this product.'

Currently in production at ashortwalk are chalkboards that look and feel like slate but are actually recycled paper, house numbers that were once yoghurt pots and sundials that were (the now viable) plant pots.

I ask about a new range of cork products and discover that the material is harvested in Spain from forests abandoned by the wine industry since the advent of plastic corks. Were it not for products such as Dan's clocks and placemats the forests would be lost, along with the biodiversity they support.

Dan's determination, not just to talk about a more sustainable future, but to participate in its creation is humbling, and it is clear that his vision reaches far beyond the horizon. ashortwalk are currently collaborating with environmental charity Hubbub and recycling company Simply Cups on The Square Mile Challenge, a City of London initiative launching this April which aims to recycle half a million disposable coffee cups in a single month. With up to seven million cups thrown away in the UK every day, of which fewer than 1% are currently recycled it is easy to understand Dan's passion.

'The convenience of single use items will persist', says Jill Scott of Clean Cornwall, 'but we have a choice, in spite of what is in front of us, to purchase consciously and behave responsibly. We should value good choices highly, because their impact will last longer than anything that we make.'

At ashortwalk, good choices extend beyond material things. Before I leave I am invited along on a lunchtime walk, a daily ritual that reminds the team of what they are working for. As promised, it is a short walk, and we eat gazing out to sea.

The place where it all began.

materials

At ashortwalk, there is no such thing as waste, just opportunity. Opportunity to not just turn the unwanted into pioneering new products but to add value, create a demand and stimulate a market so waste then becomes wanted, needed and economic. From unwanted plastic plant pots, bottles and yoghurt pots to spent coffee and plastic found on beaches; we turn waste into fantastic and durable products for you to use and reuse, time and time again. Please scroll down to learn more.

recycled coffee cups

Big problems need big solutions. Every day in the UK, up to 8 million coffee cups are thrown away, with less than 1% of these cups thought to be recycled. The main challenge to date has been the plastic film lining the paper cups, which means they are rarely recyclable. But now working with our partners Nextek and Simply Cups we are able to recycle and shred the whole coffee cup and using the strong cellulose fibres of the cup we can bond it with a special resin. This resin is mixed with recycled plastic to create a new material which can be manufactured into a range of new products, from pencils to tables and chairs. Cups are already being collected and processed and we have started to manufacture new products made from cups for companies such as Pret a Manger and McDonalds.

recycled spent grain

A common by-product of brewing beer is spent grain, which is usually given to farmers as cattle feed. Imminent legislation however means that this will soon be much harder, so breweries need to find a more sustainable solution. Our Polygrain™ is just that; a polymer made from spent grain and recycled plastic pint glasses. With this we can make products that go directly back into the brewing industry such as trays, pallets, coasters and even ice buckets. This means the once worthless grain has inherent value which enables companies to invest in recycling it. Cheers!

recycled spent coffee granules

Working with partners around the UK used coffee is collected from participating cafes and dried. Once it is in a dry powder form we can blend the coffee into a recycled polymer, typically recycled coffee cup lids. The aim of the project is to supply cafes and coffee chains with product made from their waste, from table tops to coasters and toilet roll dispensers! Adding value to the used coffee in the form of products drives up demand and makes the collection viable.

recycled plant pots

Our UK wide Pot to Product scheme is a great example of how a circular economy works. Until now traditional recycling schemes have not been able to recycle pots because the cost of transporting light and often muddy material is often more than the value of the raw material. By designing and making new products from the recycled pots, we've been able to add value to the material. As a company, we can buy recycled pot material at 10 times its traditional market value which in turn means it then becomes economic to collect and transport. We use garden centres across the UK to act as collection hubs for the public and next to the collection bins you will find an array of new useful products made from the very same pots.

recycled yoghurt pots

Used yoghurt pots are collected, cleaned and shredded back down into small flake. We can then melt the flake into new useful products. One of the advantages of using yogurt pots is that they are nearly always white or translucent so we can produce products in a range of colours.

recycled paper packaging

An interesting professional kitchen grade material made from paper bonded and fused together under high pressure. The result leaves a very high quality durable finish in a range of earthy colours. Each product in the range is food safe, will reduce blunting of knives and is 100% dishwasher safe. We are so confident your chopping board will become a family heirloom we give all boards a lifetime guarantee.

new recycled polymers

We are currently in the process of developing a range of coastal products made from plastic collected on beaches. There are some great UK wide schemes for beach waste collection 'the two minute beach clean' for example, started in Bude Cornwall and we are proud to be teaming up with Terracycle to collect, process and generate new coastal related products. We are also working on projects to recycle materials like car tyres, batteries and bumpers and turn them into great products for you to use

did you know

In the UK we currently recycle 43% of our waste when technically around 90% is recyclable. New products are being made from new, virgin materials whilst tonnes of reusable material is being thrown into landfill. With an ever increasing demand for raw materials due to growth in world population and the decreasing availability of natural resources we simply don't get that. Really, we don't.