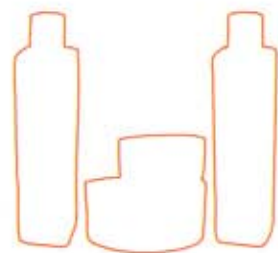
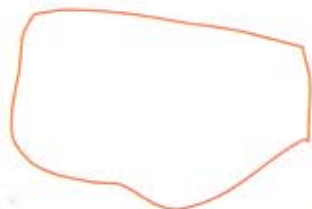
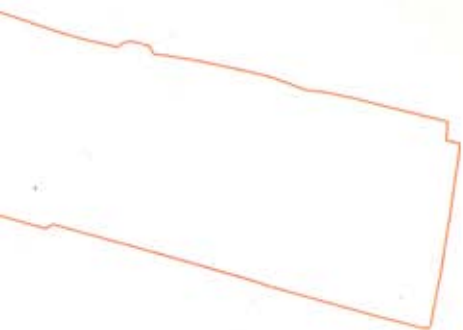


# can't see the

AS THE INTEREST IN SUSTAINABLE DESIGN BUILDS, DESIGNERS ARE TRANSCENDING THE TREES

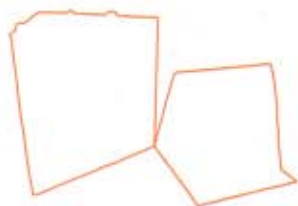


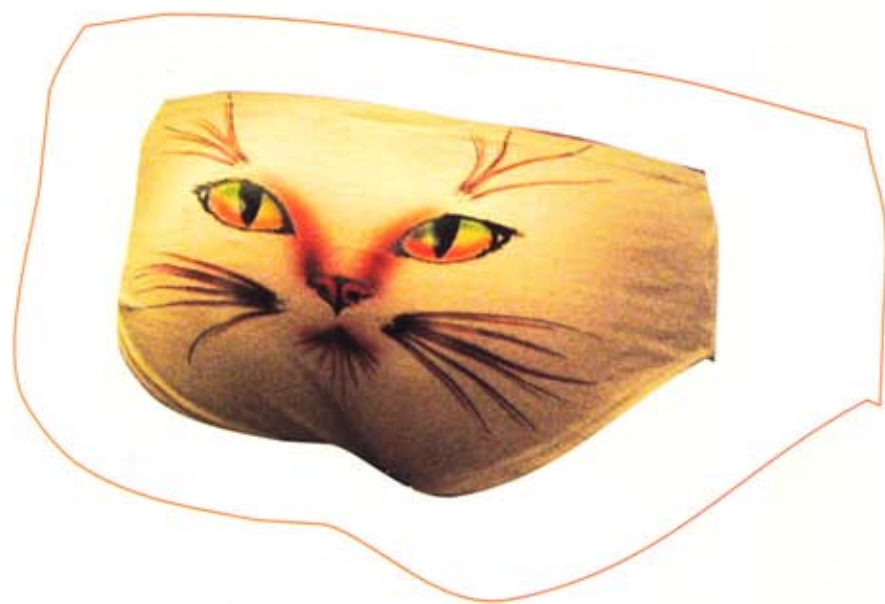
# forest

-AND-LEAVES SENSIBILITY. SOMETIMES, THE BEST OPTION IS NOT TO DESIGN ANYTHING AT ALL.

By Alice Twemlow

**Andrew Anderson** has spent the past six months building a motorcycle from a Norton bike frame, a Triumph engine, and a hodgepodge of components in the kitchen of his third-floor walk-up in Brooklyn. Logan Billingham has created a pattern (available as a PDF) for down-cycling a T-shirt into a stylish pair of underwear. Both of these projects can be found on the home page of SuperNaturale, an online forum for ideas about sustainable living.





**Top and right:** Logo and decorative motifs for SuperNaturale ([supernaturale.com](http://supernaturale.com)), an online forum and blog focused on D.I.Y. projects and alternative crafts. Design firm: Flat; creative director: Tsia Carson; interactive designer: Doug Lloyd; art director: Petter Ringbom; designer: Holly Gressley; programming: Bart Szyszka.

**Above:** Underwear made from a T-shirt, a project showcased on the SuperNaturale site. Designer: Logan Billingham.

An urbane yet hyperreal rendition of nature is referenced in the site's design, created by Petter Ringbom of the New York design studio Flat. The visual and verbal tone of this site dedicated to D.I.Y. culture and conversations about sustainability is sassy and, as Ringbom puts it, "a bit punk rock."

While SuperNaturale provides a gathering place for the sustainability community, the interactive design firm Future Farmers is amping up the green message by tapping into the visual currency of video games. In one game created by the San Francisco studio, a player's goal is to capture pollen and redirect butterflies and moles away from genetically modified plants; the project's interactive portion is supplemented in a section titled "Subplot" by detailed information about genetically modified organisms. Solar Generation, a decidedly funky Web portal for Greenpeace, is another project in which Future Farmers founder Amy Franceschini is helping to chart a contemporary, culturally relevant graphic language for sustainability. The site, with its yellow text boxes, red



Comprehending the entire life cycle of the materials used in design projects—and understanding how the products change over time—is key to sustainable design.

highlights, and eBoy-esque iconography of solar panels and wind turbines, serves as a portal for an international community of alternative-energy activists.

Sustainability hasn't typically looked or sounded like this. Its tone has often been high-pitched and pious, its visual vocabulary confined to woodcuts or washy illustrations of flora rendered in a palette of browns and greens. "Unfortunately, these causes do themselves a disservice by sticking to the trees-and-leaves esthetic," says Mark Randall, director of the design firm and nonprofit organization Worldstudio Foundation. "We want something that's empowering and that speaks on an emotional level."

As part of a project titled "Design Ignites Change," Worldstudio recently surveyed AIGA members to identify the topic they feel most passionate about. The vote, says Randall, went overwhelmingly to environmental sustainability, and in September, projects related to that topic will be launched by designers working with communities all across the country. One of Randall's aims for the initiative is to get designers to rethink and revisualize sustainability to help a wider audience look differently at the issue.

Today's environmental movement is a much more complex and fragmented entity than the one that coalesced 35 years ago around the first Earth Day and its calls to "SAVE THE EARTH" and "STOP POLLUTION." In a recent article in *Slate*, Paul Sabin, executive

director of the Environmental Leadership Program, summons environmentalists to emerge from what he sees as their "midlife crisis" and "to make everyone else care about the threats to the future that they see so clearly." But it isn't simply the buying public that needs to wake up to the urgency of these threats; as the ones who choose the materials and processes used for everything from newspapers to packaging, graphic designers determine how natural resources are used as well as the kind of waste that's produced.

"I'm amazed at how slow graphic design is on the uptake with these issues," says Janine James, founder of the design firm The Moderns. "The other design disciplines are much more advanced." Yet the impact of graphic design on the environment is clear. In a publication created for the AIGA, Don Carli, a senior research fellow at the Woodside Institute for Sustainable Communication, compiled the stark numbers: Printing inks and toners are the second-largest uses of carbon black, a substance manufactured primarily by the incomplete combustion of oil. The pulp and paper industry is the third-largest consumer of fossil fuels worldwide and one of the largest generators of air and water pollutants, waste products, and the gases that cause climate change.

To James and her firm, good design is about communicating using materials that make the least possible impact on the environment. The Moderns have followed through on this sustainability philoso-

