



A CREATIVE AND MEANINGFUL LEAP OF IMAGINATION

A (New) Material World

Good designers conduct research continuously, in order to bring their clients the benefits of best practices in design approaches, concepts, techniques and increasingly, innovative construction methods and materials.

Recently we've been looking at some amazingly creative uses of unusual materials in both construction and furniture manufacturing. What kind of materials? Cardboard tubes and mushrooms, among others.

What???

On March 24, 2014 the highest accolade in architecture, the Pritzker Prize, was awarded to the Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, renowned for crafting structures from housing to art galleries to cathedrals out of recycled materials.

Ban first proposed paper tube shelters for the millions displaced by the Rwandan civil war. In the aftermath of the 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan, he designed emergency housing with beer-crate foundations and paper-tube walls. Intended to be very temporary, in fact, these structures were used for 10 years. More recently, after the 19th-century Christchurch Cathedral in New Zealand was ravaged by a 2011 earthquake, Ban designed a strikingly serene and graceful transitional sanctuary constructed primarily of cardboard tubes.

In a Guardian interview, Ban explained, "When you finish a roll of tracing paper or fax paper, there are always paper tubes left over. They were so strong and so nice, I kept them. Then I went to the factory where they made them, and I saw they could make any length and any diameter."

Such a creative and meaningful leap of imagination.

Then there's San Francisco's Phil Ross, who, while growing mushrooms for eating and medicine more than 25 years ago, became fascinated with the way changes in temperature, the size and shape of the container, among other factors, produce variances in mushrooms' texture, color and consistency. He began to use this unusual medium to produce art. He explained, "The question isn't, 'What can fungus do?' It's, 'What do you want it to do?' Fungi are transformative agents in the truest sense of the word."

Now he is proving that just about every part of a house, from the bricks to the bed frames, can be fashioned from mushrooms.

Scientists have long been fascinated by the way a single fungal organism might comprise miles of fibrous strands fanning beneath the surface of the forest. Ross has developed a technique for concentrating such fibres into a dense, load-bearing mass. And he's initiated a whole new idea of fungal building and design that he calls "mycotecture", believing it is a breakthrough in sustainable building and a path to transcend the universal use of plastics. After all, manufacturing mushroom bricks requires less energy than pumping out plastics and the materials are biodegradable.

Ross has a long list of products that can be made from fungal strands, from car bumpers to surf boards, as well as furniture. He explains, "We haven't yet tapped into the potential that's all around us."

We think that Shigeru Ban would agree.

Are we suggesting that IN8 is going to start recommending cardboard tubes and fungi for the next office or home we design? Probably not.

But we are reminded that the whole reason we love what we do so much is the opportunity to do good design by doing good. For our clients, for society and for our own growth and satisfaction.