

Trendy wind



Philippe Starck became one of the world's most famous designers on the strength of his whimsical and tongue-in-cheek products — such as Louis XV chairs made of plastic. The French designer is now moving in a radical new direction with his miniature rooftop wind turbine, the first in his new range of 'Democratic Ecology products'. Starck says the wind turbine can produce up to 80 per cent of a home's energy. Beautifully designed, its transparent plastic blades make it virtually invisible on a roof. Starck has more green products in the pipeline, including an electric car, an eco-moped and a hydrogen-powered boat. "We're seizing every opportunity to create affordable, high-technology ecology products," says Starck. "It's very, very important that they're beautiful, because ecology should be a pleasure, not a punishment."

www.philippe-starck.com

An idea whose time has come

Solar air conditioning seems like a concept so obvious it should have been developed years ago — after all, it's when the sun is shining that you need air conditioning the most. Greencore has now developed a solar-powered air conditioner that can keep a 600 square-foot room cool using a single 170-watt solar panel. The system is a hybrid, meaning it can also charge its batteries off the grid when the sun isn't shining. McDonald's and the US Navy are reportedly testing the system — a sign that the technology probably has a bright future.

www.greencoreair.com



Ethical brew



Coffee farms in Peru are being transformed by a growing trend for certification schemes offering environmental guarantees to Western consumers. The Rainforest Alliance, an organization based in New York, runs a scheme which is helping farmers in eastern Peru return to traditional ways of farming — helping them retreat from the damaging maximum production techniques they pursued in the 1970s, when farmers deforested in order to plant more coffee plants. In addition to bringing environmental benefits, the certification scheme requires farmers to meet specific standards on payment and treatment of workers. Certified coffee sells for 15 to 20 per cent more, with part of the profits going to developing infrastructure in Peru. Currently 5.7 per cent of Peruvian coffee production is certified by the Rainforest Alliance, and the organization aims to reach 14 per cent by 2013.

www.rainforest-alliance.org

Waterless washing machine

A washing machine that uses virtually no water sounds too good to be true, yet British company Xeros says it will commercialize one for the UK market next year. The washing machine reportedly uses as little as one cup of water for each washing cycle, less than 2 per cent of the water and energy of a conventional washing machine. Plastic chips are used to remove dirt and stain from clothes. If the Xeros technology works and proves to be successful, it could make a huge difference to water use across Britain, where washing machine usage has risen by 23 per cent in the last 15 years. The average UK household uses almost 21 litres of water daily on clothes washing — 35 kilograms of water for every kilogram of clothes, according to Waterwise, a non-government organization focused on decreasing water wastage in Britain.

www.xerosltd.com



Green furnishings

With consumers increasingly wise to the environmental cost of exotic furniture, the market is seeing more and more green options. Australian manufacturer Jensen Leisure Furniture is launching a new line of chairs and tables made from the tropical hardwood Ipe, from Bolivian forests certified to the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The company providing the wood was the first in Bolivia to earn FSC certification back in 1997. The move sparked a greening of the country's forestry industry — 1.7 million hectares of Bolivia's forest are now certified, putting the country second only to Brazil in the area of FSC-certified forestland in Latin America. FSC-certified forestry operations manage their lands to ensure their long-term viability and meet environmental, social and economic criteria. The region managed by the Bolivian company is home to giant armadillos, puma, marsh deer, endangered caiman and several species of threatened birds.

www.fsc.org



Dance for the planet



London is having its first taste of eco-friendly clubbing with the inauguration of the Surya night club this July. The venue's most exciting innovation is the so-called 'piezoelectric' dancefloor, which uses quartz crystals and ceramics to turn clubbers' movements into electricity: the dancers' movements alone generate 60 per cent of the energy needed to run the club, using a technology also used by Rotterdam's Sustainable Dance Club. The remaining energy for the Surya club is produced by a wind turbine and solar energy system. The club also features waterless urinals, low flush toilets and automatic taps to ensure maximum water saving. And in another interesting move, the club gives free entry to anyone who can prove that they walked or cycled to the venue.

www.club4climate.com

Recycled cork

Time to start recycling your wine corks! As the world wakes up to the many uses that can be made of this 100 per cent natural product, community groups on every continent, from Girl Scouts to NGOs, are increasingly recycling wine corks. Cork is completely biodegradable and reusable and can be used in a thousand different ways instead of joining the world's landfill sites. Among other things, recycled cork is used for kindergarten flooring, hockey and cricket balls, place mats and coasters, shoe soles, notice boards and insulation material for walls and ceilings. It is particularly suited to floor tiles: cork's tough wearing properties provide a floor that is soft underfoot, acts as a noise insulator and is warm in winter and cool in summer. And Portugal's cork forests are used by the highly endangered Iberian lynxes to rear their young, as well as acting as a critical barrier against desertification.

www.ecofriendlyflooring.com/cork.html

