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Designing
for sustainability

October 2022

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The 6 ways we can be more sustainable in our design choices
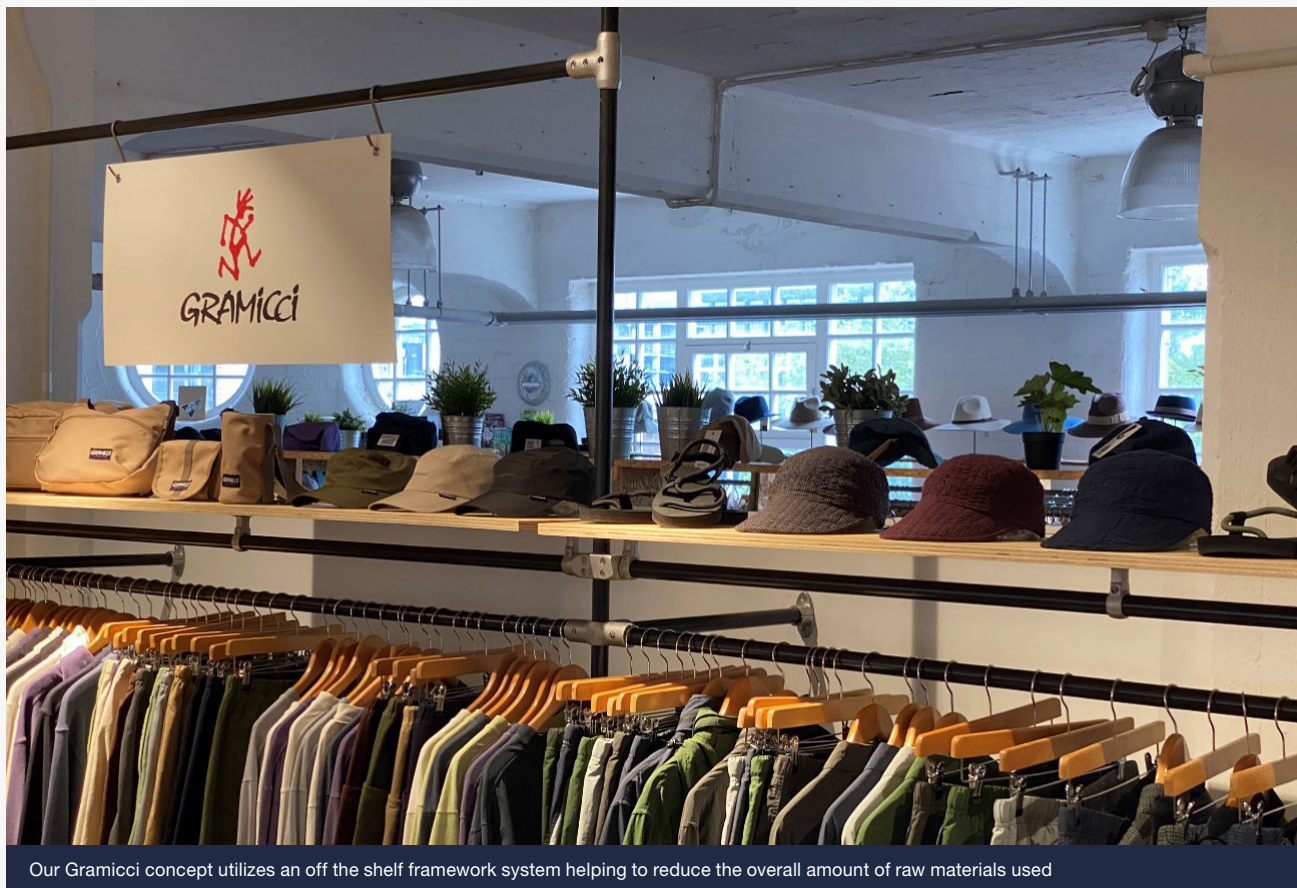
01   Improved material choices

Sustainable materials sample board

We're constantly looking for sustainable materials and finishes to specify in our designs. Finding innovative new materials challenges us to design differently and think more experimentally in terms of how we put schemes together. Sometimes, we'll come across an exciting new substrate which may not be suitable for a current live project, but can be kept in mind for future activity.

In some cases, we may even design a scheme or concept around a specific material. It keeps our thinking fresh and exciting to keep looking at what's coming next, and how we might integrate newly-developed responsible materials into our designs.

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02 Less, but better

Our Gramicci concept utilizes an off the shelf framework system helping to reduce the overall amount of raw materials used

One obvious way of reducing our impact is to use less material. We use the phrase 'lean' to describe this way of working.

How can we distil down what we are designing to only what is necessary - making something functional but at the same time still aesthetically pleasing?

If an element within a design concept is serving only a decorative purpose, can we remove it in order to reduce the overall material use?

This is something that generally goes down well with our clients as there is often a tangible cost saving. Less material = less cost.

As Dieter Rams famously said:

"Good design is as little design as possible. Less, but better – because it concentrates on the essential aspects, and the products are not burdened with non-essentials"

On a day-to-day level this also means reducing the amount we print in the office. It's also about challenging our clients who could be considering producing designs in a printed form and asking whether an alternative approach which doesn't require the use of large quantities of resources might be more appropriate. For example, creating digital or online files vs physical documents.

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03   Re-use and recycle

The Outsiders store re-purposed many elements within the space, and made use of the existing walls and floors

When we start our interior design projects we take a good look at what is already there within the fabric of that particular space. What can we re-use/re-purpose/give a new lease of life to and then integrate into the design from the outset? For instance, can the existing floor finish be retained? Does that exposed wall need to be plaster-boarded over? Can the existing lighting be utilised?

Adopting this mindset from the start forces us to think creatively and to look at different ways of doing things. The upside is that revealing what already exists within a space can provide much more texture and visual interest than can be achieved by concealing everything and starting over.

Incorporating these unexpected and bespoke elements into our designs can take a scheme to another level. The design challenges that arise from this kind of thinking can provide a unique narrative to a space and make the end result much more purposeful and considered.

The upholstery was made from decommissioned climbing ropes

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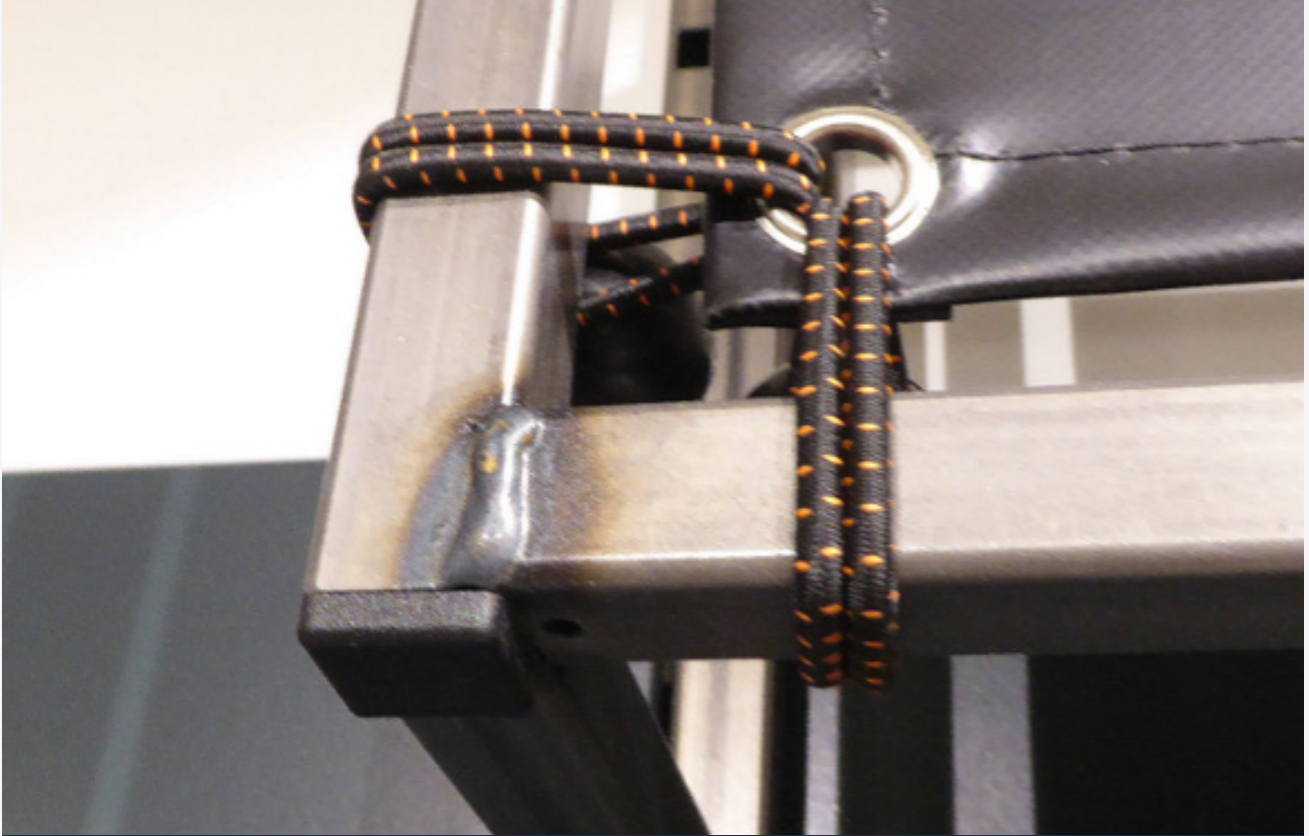## 04   End of life considerations

Our exhibition fixture system for BECO Pets is fully demountable and can be taken apart and put back together as many times as required

Sustainable design is not just about making the right material and product choices at the start of a project. It is vitally important that we consider what happens to all of this when a project reaches the end of its life. We need to design with circularity in mind. This means allowing for fixtures and fittings (and the materials they are composed from) to be disassembled and separated out and made into something new again with minimal waste.

Specifying materials that carry cradle-to-cradle credentials means that these can be fully recycled at the end of their life, turning them back into new materials and creating a closed loop. To allow for furniture and fittings to be taken apart once they are no longer useful, we look at ways of minimising the use of permanent fixings and bonds so that individual components can be easily separated for ease of recycling/re-use. We also look to specify furniture from suppliers that build this into their products from the outset.

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05   Design for longevity

All signage elements within our Ellis Brigham scheme have been designed to be completely functional and durable

One easy way to reduce the amount of material going to landfill from our physical projects is to design for longevity. This means making design decisions based around functionality and durability and not just aesthetics. Is this the right material for the job, and will it last? Is there enough flexibility built into the design to allow for the end use to change and evolve without the need to throw things away and start again? Can we create physical spaces that would allow a future tenant to re-use the same equipment? In this way, things don't need to be continually replaced each time.

"The best way to predict the future is to design the future"

— Buckminster Fuller

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06 Bringing people with us

We work with our construction partners to find new ways of building more sustainable spaces together

Educating our construction partners and challenging them to be more sustainable or to consider more responsible ways of working is a big part of the process. Contractors often have set ways of working that they stick to methodically. It is our duty to question some of these practices and encourage them to look at things with a more sustainable mindset. We try and set them clear goals from the start, to encourage them to work as responsibly as possible.

In summary, we see the opportunity to lead the conversation about sustainable design with our clients and partners and want to encourage other designers to do the same. There needs to be a collective commitment to continually improving our understanding of the latest developments in materials, approaches and techniques in order to drive design decisions.

For more information please check out our **Sustainable Design Hub** or get in touch via **greener@wdc-creative.com**

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