

GREATER GOODS

THE LUXURY INDUSTRY STANDS ACCUSED OF DISREGARDING THE GLOBAL CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABILITY, YET THE REALITY IS THAT LUXURY MAY ACTUALLY BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Text Jocelyn Warrington Photographs Supplied

It's been a challenging time for the luxury industry. In the wake of the threat to sales caused by the 2007-08 economic crisis and a growing awareness of real social and environmental challenges, such as climate change and wars over resources, not to mention increasing consumer expectations of luxury brands, the industry as a whole has been forced to take a good, hard look at where it stands in the real world.

'Luxury brands are used to being very proud and, in many areas of craftsmanship and heritage, justifiably so, but, until 10 years ago, they couldn't really be too proud of their performance on social and environmental issues,' says Dr Jem Bendell, professor of sustainability leadership and founder of the Institute for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS) at the University of Cumbria in the UK.

Today, however, the world of luxury is changing fast and might even provide some solutions to global challenges. Brought to a head by the impending economic crash, the real watershed moment for the industry came in 2007 when the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) published a report, researched by Bendell and Anthony Kleanthous, global policy adviser at the WWF (UK), entitled 'Deeper Luxury: Quality and Style When the World Matters'.

Bendell explains: 'The "Deeper Luxury" report came about because the WWF, as one of the world's largest environmental organisations, had made a commitment a few years previously to move beyond talking about conservation as something "out there" — the beautiful environments that we want to protect — and to actually start talking about how we ourselves, through what we consume, where we work and what we invest in, affect the state of the planet.'

The report not only mapped out the social and environmental challenges facing the luxury industry, such as pollution through mining and working conditions in factories, but also made a compelling case for why luxury brands would benefit commercially from addressing such concerns.

'But what we found was that luxury brands were seriously lagging behind,' says Bendell. 'Many had no policies on social and environmental performance and no systematic approach to monitoring their performance and reporting it or engaging with stakeholders to find out what the most important issues were. And we found that many ethical indices of the best companies on social and environmental performance didn't include any of the luxury brands at all.'

The report graded and ranked the companies, giving none higher than a C-plus. It also called on celebrities to be more responsible when choosing which brands to endorse. 'Some of the world's leading fashion journalists said that in the 18 months after the report came out, there was the beginning of a paradigm shift in the industry towards recognition that sustainability is core to the concept of luxury,' says Bendell, adding that the report seemed to have awakened a recognition in the industry that sustainability was an area in which luxury brands, which base a lot of their worth on perception, must take the lead.

IS GREEN THE NEW BLACK?

But what is sustainability? It was defined by the UN General Assembly in 1987 as 'meeting the needs of the present without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. And, indeed, as Bendell points out, if we all

lived as Europeans do right now, we'd need three planets to support us.

Fortunately, a good many players in the luxury industry have woken up to their responsibilities beyond the success of their businesses and, at last, the industry has begun to examine its role in all facets of sustainability.

As importantly, research shows that consumers, too, want to be part of the sustainability solution, claims Dr Guy Champniss, associate professor in marketing at Henley Business School and co-author of *Brand Valued: How Socially Valued Brands Hold the Key to a Sustainable Future and Business Success*. 'Increasingly, consumers are looking to brands — not governments — to lead this debate,' he says.

Champniss points out that, interestingly, new and emerging markets have moved up significantly on the luxury industry's agenda in recent years. 'If we look now at what is happening in the world of luxury goods, we are seeing that a lot of these companies are pinning all their hopes on markets like India, Brazil, China, Mexico and even Africa,' he explains. 'The explosion in the middle class worldwide, and especially in emerging markets, means that luxury brands are very aspirational to these consumers. And one of the things that we've found in our research is that consumers in emerging markets are more highly engaged with issues around sustainability than in the developed markets. So, what luxury brands can do is help deliver a solution to the sustainability debate to these consumers by helping them make the right choices in terms of products and services which are sustainable.'

Bendell agrees: 'Luxury brands are global, famous, prestigious, aspirational brands, and if we want the world to come together to actually change consumer behaviour and live sustainably, we need to see sustainable living as aspirational.'

LEADING THE WAY

Since 2009, the 1.618 Sustainable Luxury Fair (in partnership with the *New York Times*), which takes place annually in Paris, has been one of the most illustrious international opportunities for carefully selected eco-lifestyle entrepreneurs, artists and designers to exhibit their luxury products and projects, as part of, according to the fair's manifesto, 'a campaign for a better world and to participate in defining the luxury of the 21st century'.

'There are many goals behind this event, but chief among them is to integrate the notion of both luxury and sustainability, which, I believe, are naturally related,' explains the fair's founder, Barbara Coignet. 'The 1.618 Sustainable Luxury Fair is a platform for those luxury businesses that have incorporated the core values of eco-conceptualisation, human respect, ethics, and to inspire end users who want to live with greater meaning.'

The premise of the 1.618 Sustainable Luxury Fair is that exhibitors, products and services have to be both ecologically sound and luxurious in nature. The exhibits range from electric sports cars to recycled gold jewellery, from solar-powered speedboats to natural beauty products. 'We look at everything, from the product's CO₂ footprint to the materials used in its manufacture and the actual manufacturing processes themselves — how it was made, where it was made and who made it,' says Coignet.

MOAROOM (RODERICK FRY)

Roderick Fry, one of the designers of New Zealand's Moaroom (moaroom.com), is best known for his eco-conceived Pi System of tables made from sustainably sourced wood and upcycled old beams and featuring in the catalogues of some of the world's most respected design houses. The clever idea allows for the easy conceptualisation of a variety of solid-standing tables by the simple insertion of planks or panels and the pivoting into place of the metal legs — with not a screw in sight. Its popularity in Europe has proven that design fans are willing to make the effort to work with local forests, artisans and recuperated materials to personalise their own 'designer' furniture and reduce transport globally.



MAPPING THE FUTURE

Of course, luxury tourism has been flying the sustainability flag for many years. An early pioneer in terms of responsible eco-behaviour in its business practices is Abercrombie & Kent, widely regarded as the world's leading luxury holiday company. 'We have always been very aware of environmental health, education and ecology, and we put a lot of money into these initiatives in the areas where we operate,' says Geoffrey Kent, the company's founder and CEO. 'The fact is that high-end modern travellers wants to play their part in being sustainable, but they still expect the highest levels of service and hospitality.'

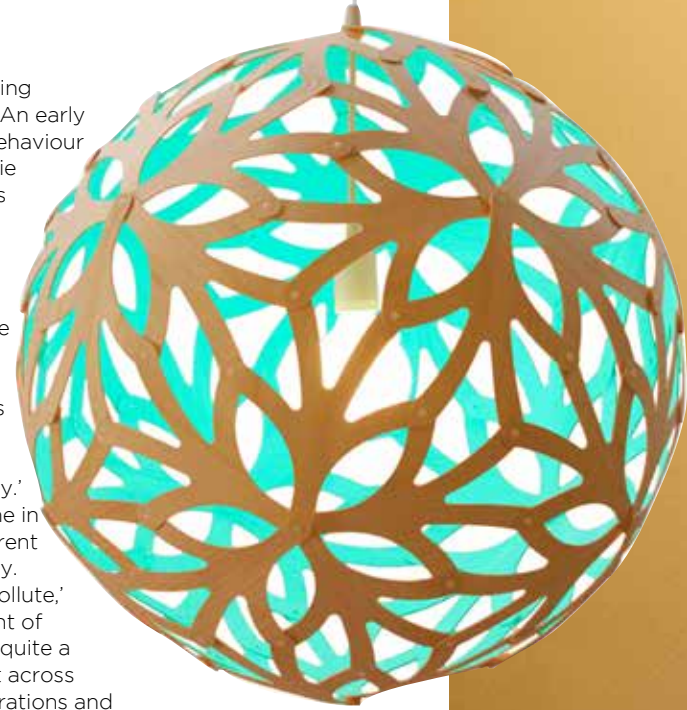
Luxury transport, however, has come in for some serious criticism for its apparent indifference to matters of sustainability. 'We are by definition an emitter; we pollute,' says Alain Aubry, former vice president of Dassault Aviation. Carbon emission is quite a topical subject, not just in aviation but across the board, and several private-jet operations and manufacturers, Dassault among them, seem to be bucking the trend. Aubry explains how the French business jet supplier has been able to significantly reduce emissions on a number of its aircraft: 'We reduce both the weight and the drag of the aircraft and from that we are able to reduce the fuel by 30 to 40 per cent in comparison to our competitors.'

While firms like Dassault strive to reduce the consumption of traditional fuels, others, such as Brazil's Embraer Executive Jets, are looking further afield for new answers. Explains the company's senior vice president and COO of commercial aviation Luis Carlos Affonso, 'Brazil has the largest fleet of cars powered by ethanol, which we produce from sugar cane, and we were the first company to produce in series an aeroplane powered by ethanol. And we are investing in this biofuel for other applications too.'

What is clear is that we're by no means going back to a horse-and-cart society. Instead, what we are seeing is that innovation, technology and clear, clever thinking combined with good capital initiatives can create great solutions for a modern yet luxurious way of life. How some luxury brands are responding to issues of sustainability has proven to be multifaceted. According to Christian Blanckaert, former CEO of Hermès International, for instance, 'This crisis can lead us to put more emphasis on innovation and creation, and in that respect, sustainability is the key to innovation.'

Adds Bendell, 'Luxury brands have a platform to effect change and to get people to listen and, perhaps in some instances, this industry can do more than government intervention to get people to change.'

What goes without saying, however, is that sustainability is the future of luxury. How high-end brands respond to our changing world will determine whether they have a future at all and whether they will still have a heritage to one day admire.



THIS IMAGE Extracted from Fairmined-certified mines, the sought-after, futuristic pieces made by France's JEM (Jewellery Ethically Minded, jem-paris.com) meet rigorous standards for the environmental protection and economic and social development of mining communities. The brand's eco commitments have earned it a sought-after place in this year's *1,618 Sustainable Luxury Guide*. **LEFT** David Trubridge, key designer of New Zealand's Moaroom (moaroom.com), is best known for his eco-conceived collection of computer-modelled lights made of wood from sustainable forests. Featuring in the collections of a number of international museums as well as the catalogues of some of the world's most respected design houses, Italy's illustrious Cappellini included, the lamps and pendants come as a flat pack, which reduces their transport impact by as much as 40 times what it would be if they were delivered assembled



THIS IMAGE Founded by Ali Hewson and her husband, U2 front man Bono, high-end fashion brand Edun (edun.com) focuses on a positive trading relationship with Africa. Part of the prestigious LVMH Group of more than 70 luxury brands, Edun aims to source sustainable materials to produce at least 40 per cent of its fashion collection in Africa this year. **ABOVE** A sensitively redesigned colonial-era property set in a beautiful coffee estate fringed by rainforest, Fazenda Catuçaba (catucaba.com) is recognised as one of the most luxurious ecological refuges in Brazil. Featured in the *1,618 Sustainable Luxury Guide* for 2015, the property's 450ha include an operational organic farm. **RIGHT** A luxurious natural haven situated less than an hour from Lisbon, the Areias do Seixo (areiasdoseixo.com) hotel is a recipient of the international Green Key award in recognition of its sustainable methods of operation. 'The hotel has a strong environmental conscience,' says co-owner Gonçalo Alves. 'Our policy of environmental sustainability extends throughout the lifecycle of all of the hotel's activities while still ensuring that the quality and excellence of our service is maintained'



LUXURY TRENDS

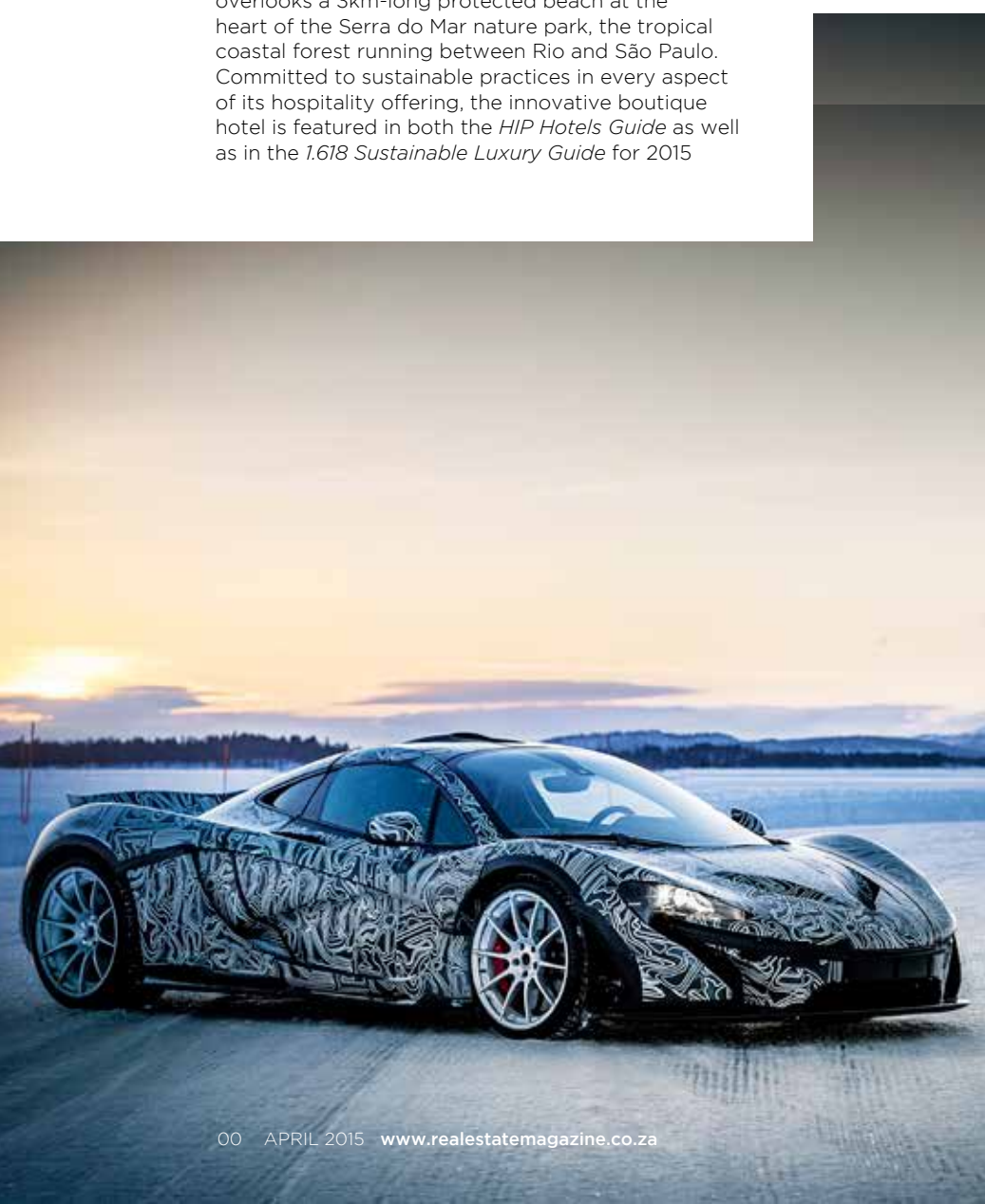
INSET Committed to using only ethically sourced gems, Graff Diamonds (graffdiamonds.com) adheres to the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, which was established by the UN in 2003 to prevent conflict diamonds from entering the mainstream rough-diamond market and 'to ensure that diamond purchases were not financing violence by rebel movements and their allies seeking to undermine legitimate governments'. The majority of Graff's diamonds are laser engraved with unique tracking numbers which, while invisible to the naked eye, allow for their origins to be traced. Pictured here is Graff's sapphire-and-diamond secret-tassel brooch with concealed pavé diamond watch face suspended from a delicate platinum chain. It can be worn three ways: as a single piece, as individual brooches or as a single brooch with tassel

RIGHT This silk camel-print tie dress from luxury fashion brand Edun was made in Madagascar as part of its endeavour to promote fair trade in Africa. Edun sources materials from Kenya, Tunisia, Morocco, Madagascar and Uganda. It has nearly 10 000 farmers in northern Uganda, for instance, supplying its cotton. It also collaborates with larger, established labels, most recently Diesel, in the creation of limited-edition collections

BELOW LEFT The McLaren P1 is the limited-production plug-in hybrid supercar from the iconic British luxury automotive manufacturer. Power for the electric motor is stored in a 324-cell lithium-ion high-density battery pack located behind the cabin, and the car can be fully charged within two hours through the plug-in equipment **BELOW RIGHT** Recognised as one of the most luxurious ecological refuges in Brazil, Picinguaba (picinguaba.com) overlooks a 3km-long protected beach at the heart of the Serra do Mar nature park, the tropical coastal forest running between Rio and São Paulo. Committed to sustainable practices in every aspect of its hospitality offering, the innovative boutique hotel is featured in both the *HIP Hotels Guide* as well as in the *1.618 Sustainable Luxury Guide for 2015*



THIS IMAGE Architects Jakob and MacFarlane (jakobmacfarlane.com) remodelled the old Paris docks to create the Cité de la Mode. Their sculptural LED light installation further inspired them to create the LED pendant lamp, Float, which is available through Moaroom



BELOW Experts agree that innovation is a key driving force behind the sustainable movement. Wanting to tackle waste and champion recycling, UK-based Elvis & Kresse (elvisandkresse.com) turned old British fire hoses destined for the landfill into coveted luxury bags, belts and wallets. By offering top-drawer items that are eco-friendly and come with a clean conscience, brands like these demonstrate that there is no need for a compromise between luxury and sustainability



THIS IMAGE Pioneering a new vision of mobility, Lamborghini's Asterion is a concept car with plug-in hybrid powertrain that significantly reduces CO₂ emissions and has a range of 50km on the battery alone