



**Rubbish removed: Brightly coloured bowls made from recycled materials from South Africa at Shweshwe**

## A touch of grass

Silky bamboo fabric is finding its way into fashion boutiques. It is only one of many examples of new products that are helping to preserve the planet. Report: Kath Walters

● Amanda and Elouise Danby fell in love with fabric made from bamboo after feeling a sample sent by a manufacturer in China in 2005.

The sisters had expected the fabric to be coarse like hemp. "We couldn't believe it; it was so soft and silky," Elouise Danby says. "We thought, 'Everyone needs to know about this!'"

Their excitement led them to create a whole fashion business, Bamboo Body, around bamboo fabric. They found it has other marketable qualities: it breathes more easily and is more absorbent than cotton, resists mould and odours and is cool in hot weather and warm in cool weather. Danby says bamboo costs between 20 per cent and 50 per cent more than cotton because it is made to order in small quantities.

It wasn't easy convincing shops and consumers to buy their first range, created in 2006. "People are just used to what they normally buy," Danby says. "Most boutiques don't care about fabric; they stick to what they know. That is changing as time goes by."

Interest in organic fabrics is catching on worldwide. An international certification

group, Oeko-Tex, based in Zurich, Switzerland, issued 209 certificates to organic-fabric product classes in 1993. In 2007, it accredited 64,920 product classes.

"People expect eco-fashion to be daggy," Danby says. The sisters made their products deliberately mainstream: basic singlet tops, T shirts, wraps, dresses and pants for women and a small range of tops and shorts for men, as well as socks and a baby blanket.

Sydney designer Lisa Gorman started selling clothes made from organic material in 2007 and uses bamboo fabric in about 25 per cent of her Gorman Organic range. Gorman Industries employs 65 people, has eight stores and supplies retailers including David Jones.

"Bamboo fabric is like rayon; it is quite dense and flowing," Gorman says. "But sustainable fabrics to date have been quite chunky. Bamboo fabric is fine and really durable."

She will include bamboo fabrics in her range in the next two years. "People who are not shopping for sustainable clothes pick it up anyway and are surprised to find it is made from bamboo." **BRW**

## Solar flair

Storage is the Holy Grail of solar energy. The sun is a plentiful source of energy but without a cheap way to store it in large quantities it can never be harnessed to replace the fossil fuels that contribute to global warming. At present, solar cannot be used at night and even daytime use is variable.

Last May, a chemistry professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Daniel Nocera, claimed to have taken the first step to a solution. He showed that the sun could be used to split water into easy-to-store hydrogen fuel that could be burned later in an internal combustion engine or recombined in a fuel cell, the MIT magazine, *Technology Review*, reported.

It is a process that mimics nature's method of storing energy: photosynthesis. Nocera's claim of a breakthrough is not based on his ability to split water into its components; it is that he has a cheap catalyst which works at room temperature without using dangerous chemicals.

## Plumb position

There are plenty of hard ways to make money out of green ideas – and then there is the sale recently of the GreenPlumbers trademark for \$250,000.

A publicly listed company, Green Invest, paid \$250,000 for the trademark from the Master Plumber Mechanical Services Association of Australia.

Even so, Green Invest did not get all the rights: the master plumbers retain the rights to provide training for plumbers to get their GreenPlumbers licence and to obtain related sponsorship under the brand in Australia, New Zealand and North America.

Green Invest is a pooled development fund investing in environmental businesses. So far, in addition to GreenPlumbers, these include a carbon-credit trading business, Nextgen, and a consultancy called Sustainable Footprint.

## Trash treasure

Carmel Pitt, the founder of a Melbourne gift shop, Shweshwe, in the inner-city suburb of Fitzroy, initially received a cool reception to her product range – toys, decorations and other hand-made handicrafts imported from South Africa, about 80 per cent of which are made from recycled materials.

"We did get a lot of shocked reactions – that it is rubbish with a price tag," Pitt says. "But as time has gone on, people are more aware of what they buy, and there is a trend to sustainability."

Rubbish is the most readily available material for local craft workers in South Africa who transform items such as telephone cable, old tin and discarded bottle-tops into bowls and vases, rubbish into rubbish bins, and plastic into toys and dolls.