

A Look into Sustainable Composites Rejuvenating Leather

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Abstract

The demand of finding creative ways of sustainability in today's society has never been higher. It is the responsibility of this generation to look at a situation that can be harmful to our environment and find a clever solution that will be beneficial for the next generation. This article demonstrates how the owners of Sustainable Composites took an opportunity and created a product that exemplifies the art of sustainability.

Leather has become a staple material for various types of products that the world uses every day. You go outside, you see a stranger walking down the street with a nice new pair of leather Timberland shoes, or maybe you are looking to purchase a new couch set from the furniture store. Leather is a desirable material for our sense of taste, which is why Sustainable Composites LLC has created, what they call, Enspire Leather.

What Makes Sustainable Composites Special

The owners of Sustainable Composites LLC, Tom Tymon and Frank Fox, are engineers and scientists with prior experience in R&D, production, management, as well as executive positions for a subdivision company of Armstrong World Industries before eventually selling the company in 2012. Tymon and Fox always have been concerned with utilizing materials to their full potential. They recognized that there was an opportunity to create great value uses for underutilized materials, which is where the

wonderful idea of leather came from. The owners understood that there were other organizations that produced useful leather products, although the products were not high-value products. However, the products of these organizations do not deliver the same quality and desirable aspect of the leather products that Sustainable Composites LLC puts out, according to the owners. Enspire Leather passes the eye test and the overall use test as it is just as reliable and appealing as regular hide leather. In fact, it can easily be argued because of how the Enspire Leather is produced, it is better than the original leather. "It's cheaper than hide leather because it comes in perfectly rectangular dimensions with no holes or imperfections. You get better yield as a result and you can send any leftover material back to us to recycle so you can become a zero-loss company," (F. Fox, personal interview, December 11, 2019). He expects cost savings to be at about 20% for its recycled leather (F.Fox, personal interview, December 11, 2019).

How We Get Enspire Leather

The raw leather material Sustainable Composites uses comes from the Wilson football factory in Ada, Ohio. Contrary to popular belief, not all the leather makes the cut in being processed into a certified football. The excess material from the factory used to be sent to be incinerated or landfill; but now thanks to Tymon and Fox, all that potential wasted leather gets transported to the Sustainable Composites warehouse in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. As a result, thousands of pounds of waste are repurposed into quality leather products for the public to use and enjoy. The actual process to create Enspire Leather was not an easy feat, as Tymon and Fox had to rely on their scientific background, “We had to figure out how to break the bonds in leather to release the fibers and then turn them into a slurry that can be poured into a paper machine and formed into sheets. It was quite a job.” (T. Tymon, personal interview, December 11, 2019). Knowing what they wanted to do, the owners turned to using chemistry for the how part to reach their desired goal for the leather. Finally, they discovered the right combination of common and Eco-friendly chemicals to produce what they were looking for, hence the “E” in their product title to highlight the environmental awareness in their products. Another sustainable friendly aspect that Enspire Leather results in is the fact that since it is indeed recycled leather, it cuts down on the number of animals killed for leather, along with the amount of landfill. Enspire Leather has already caught the interest of other big-name companies who are

looking for environmentally friendly products such as La-Z-Boy. Enspire Leather is expected to debut their products for La-Z-Boy in 2020. Sustainable Composites is also looking to get into the \$91.2 billion global fashion leather goods market as this market is heavily invested in finding sustainable sources and Enspire Leather fits that bill. The sustainable aspect of Enspire Leather has even caught the eye of the popular company Timberland. The president of the Timberland, Jim Pisani, announced that Timberland will introduce their new footwear created from recycled leather from Sustainable Composites fall 2020.

The Future of Sustainable Composites

Sustainable Composites are not content with where they are as of now, even with their early success. They still have future plans for Enspire Leather. One of the things they want to expand on is receiving leather scraps from other companies in addition to the Wilson Football factory. Companies in the leather industry produce waste which they would have to pay someone to take, therefore sending their scrap leather to Sustainable Composites would help them save money and increase the base materials for Sustainable Composites. Another area they want to grow upon in the future is marketing their own Enspire Leather accessories such as bags, belts, and other products. They hope to do focus groups and have people come look at their products and eventually be able to launch a series of accessories in house where people can buy Enspire Leather products in house on their website.

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