



Textiles & Composites from Tree Bark

BARK CLOTH®_Europe

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“BioMaterial of the Year” & “Materialica Design + Technology” Awards for BARKTEX®_Plus-Latex_059

Bark Cloth is known as the world's most ancient fleece. It is valued by designers for its unique texture and sensual character. The DLR German Aerospace Center is testing it as a matrix in fiber composites, which show extraordinary flexibility and punching tenacity for use in planes. BARKTEX®_Plus-Latex_059 is a robust fleece from the sub-bark of *Ficus natalensis*, coated with natural latex of *Hevea brasiliensis*.

In 1999, the European-African family venture BARK CLOTH®, pioneer of systematic bark cloth production, started in cooperation with Ugandan small-scale organic farmers to produce bark textiles in industrially interesting amounts. Meanwhile, the former foreign aid project in cooperation with GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) not only stands on its own two feet, but also secures income for hundreds of small-scale farmers' families. In 2005, bark cloth production was declared by UNESCO a cultural heritage of humanity.

The technical agroforestry-textile is a 100% tree product, gained without need of destroying any tree. Its two components bark-fleece and latex are extremely fast growing, permanently renewable resources, which can be harvested once (bark) to several times (latex) per year. Due to its latex-coated surface, the mouldable fleece shows abrasion optimized, water- and stain-resistant characteristics. It is manufactured in a unique, zero-carbon-emitting, de-centralized and “de-materialized” process where partially low-tech, yet intelligent solar technology is used. The substitute for petroleum-based materials has a potential for use as furniture upholstery, in sports/outdoor gear and fashion, for armoured cases and in the automotive sector. It is available in several versions. Since the latex is gained in wild cultivation and thus protects the Amazon rainforest and since the deep-rooter *Ficus natalensis* is anyway widely planted to provide shade and nutrition from deep soil areas in mixed coffee- and horticultural farms, their extraction does not compete with agricultural land for food production.

BARKTEX®_Plus-Latex_059 is a contribution to the 2009 UN International Year of Fibres. It is a joint development of the Ugandan-German BARK CLOTH® group with the Brazilian rubber-collector co-operative Seringueiro Machado do Oeste and the Rainforest Institute – Institute for applied rainforest protection.

In 2008, BARKTEX®_Plus-Latex_059 – was awarded a “Materialica Design + Technology Award” and won the 2nd prize of the “Bio Material of the Year Innovation Award” competition of the Cologne Nova Institute. Other bark fibre textile developments have been honoured with several awards for material engineering, innovations and design, such as a “2005 iF material award”, a “2005 Materialica Award”, a “2006 Innovation Award of the University City of Freiburg” and been nominated for the official “2007 Design Award of the Federal Republic of Germany”. The company continues to push forward the development of ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable fibre materials for use in furniture, sports equipment, and automotive. Furthermore, BARK CLOTH® is co-initiator of the German Foundation for Environment (DBU) financed NIOS (Sustainable Innovations in the Outdoor- and Sports Sectors) research project and co-owner of the International Bark Fibre Research and Training Institute in Kampala, Uganda. The goal is to become a crystallization point for the collocation of knowledge about bark fibre materials in Africa, Latin America and the South Pacific.

Information: materialicadesign.com, nova-institut.de, regenwald-institut.de, barkttx.com

By appointment to H.M. Kabaka Ronald Mwenda Mutebi II, 37th King of the Buganda Kingdom
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