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Having a Moment

Designers are Clamoring for Cork—But Why?

See all the ways designers are using this super-sustainable staple

By Hannah Martin

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Nearly every material has undergone a greenwashing campaign by this point. There are even versions of plastic that are now branded as “sustainable.” But lately, designers are embracing one surface that really does seem like the real deal: cork. Made from the outer bark of the cork oak tree, which can grow in Mediterranean climates for up to 200 years, the material is hand-harvested every nine years without harming the tree.





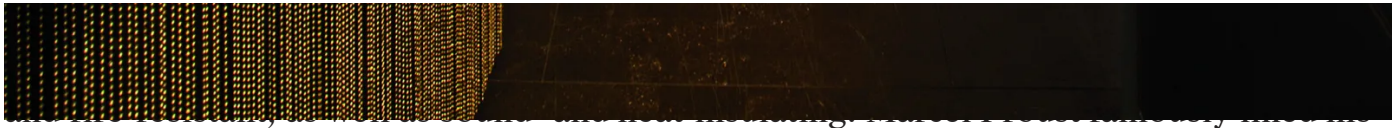
who runs the Washington-based studio [Grain](#) with her husband, James. “Due to the regeneration process, the more bark harvested from the tree, the more carbon is absorbed.” The studio’s latest line of [cork furniture](#), a series of clover-shaped side and cocktail tables, debuted at [New York’s Colony gallery](#) in September.

Theirs was one of several cork-forward collections that we clocked this fall, as designers follow in the footsteps of pioneers like Tom Dixon, who has embraced the material in [his furniture designs](#) since 2017. Also in September, French designer [Noé Duchaufour-Lawrance](#) unveiled sculptural burnt [cork furniture](#) at Demisch Danant gallery in New York, and London-based designer Matilda Goad used the material to make lamps and urns with a classical twist. (“I wanted the material to be seen in a different, more elevated way,” she explains.) They’re all sourcing the material from Portugal, where nearly half of the globe’s cork is harvested.



A cork-covered interior belonging to Emma Chamberlain. The guest bathroom in the influencer's LA home is clad in cork wall tiles. Photo: Christopher Sturman





bedroom in the material to prevent pollen and dust from aggravating his allergies and asthma.

Soft yet durable, cork can be used both indoors and outdoors, and doesn't need to be sealed with potentially harmful chemicals. "All of our work is solid cork, so if there is ever an issue with the surface, it can be easily refreshed with a light sanding," Minola explains.



Charlap Hyman & Herrero used cork from Duro Design on the floors of an eclectic LA home. **Photo: Laure Joliet**



Lena Waithe and Rishi Rajani wrapped their LA conference room in [gold cork wallpaper](#) by Candice Olson for York Wallcoverings. Photo: Joshua Kissi

Unsurprisingly, interior designers have been embracing the staple for many of the same reasons, using it liberally on floors and walls. In a young couple's London flat, Beata Heuman employed its sound-absorbing skills to use by cladding the walls of the home office. Charlap Hyman & Herrero used cork from Duro Design on the floors of an [eclectic LA home](#), while a coffee-colored version was laid underfoot at a [Louisiana retreat](#) by Thad Hayes. And in Emma Chamberlain's [guest bath in LA](#), wall tiles by [CorkHouse](#) were applied to the walls to an enveloping extent.

"It's durable, relatively inexpensive, sound-absorbing—a great alternative to wood that still has the warmth and natural feel," says interior designer Jessica Ayromloo, who mixed it with graphic cement tiles on the floor of a colorful [Mexico City apartment](#). She then carried the material into the kitchen, applying it to the faces of stainless steel cabinets. "The place wouldn't have felt as cozy without the cork, especially since the owner didn't want rugs in the living spaces," Ayromloo says.

Beata Heuman covers the walls of a London home office in cork. **Photography courtesy Beata Heuman**

Miles Redd applied cork as though it was tile, complete with corner squares, to lend a more formal look to a butler's pantry in Ohio. **Photo: Ryan Kurtz**

Depending on the application, cork can warm things up or lend a cool, industrial feeling. Take designer Miles Redd's varied approaches: He's applied it like tile, complete with corner squares, to lend a more formal look to [a butler's pantry in Ohio](#), and in an edgier take, he envelopes a [Connecticut playroom](#) in the material in an effort to tone down the room's pitched roof. Even architect David Rockwell likes to dress up the material, adding metallic foil to inlaid cork for his [wall covering collection for Maya Romanoff, dubbed Porto](#). "We took an organic and humble material and added a bit of drama and sparkle," he shares.

Despite small boosts in popularity over the years—from early 20th-century designer Paul Frankl's ardor of cork veneer to contemporary designers' renewed interests—cork in

interior and furniture design still seems like a relatively novel frontier. A material that feels almost futuristic, Minola says. “The idea that you harvest just what you need—not too much—and don’t disturb the ecosystem that surrounds it, is the way that we all need to be thinking about living in relationship with the natural world.”

Shop the Material



Small Cork Urn

\$187 at Matilda Goad & Co



Cork Stool Model A by Vitra

\$695 at MoMA Design Store

Arch Solid Cork Contemporary Sculptural Carved Side Table Stool by Grain



\$2,750 at 1stDibs



Decorative Cork Wall Tile

\$8 at CorkHouse



Cork wallpaper in Gold by Candice Olson for York Wallcoverings

\$396 at York Wallcoverings

Obelisk Cork Lamp Base



\$500 at Matilda Goad & Co

Bisu Cork Bed Frame by OTQ



\$11,995 at 1stDibs

Vira Cork Accent stool by Galula



\$305 at Chairish



Sinatra dining table

\$10,358 at Frama

Drifted Stool, Light Cork by Lars Beller Fjetland



\$399 at Hem



Isla Cork Planter by Mind the Cork

\$38 at Etsy



Little Cloud Tray

\$38 at Craighill



Medium Cork bowl by Vitra

\$205 at Mytheresa



Trove Box, Rectangular

\$60 at Design Within Reach

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