

AUTOMOTIVE

As Bentley redefines luxury, planet takes priority

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Together with front-running premiere art and design publication *Dezeen*, the brand launches "Lighthouse Talks." Image credit: Bentley Motors

By AMIRAH KEATON

British automaker Bentley is playing host to the first of many panels focused on carving out a more tenable future, in response to today's climate concerns.

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In partnership with premiere art and design publication *Dezeen*, the brand has launched "Lighthouse Talks," a series deeply interested in the generation of sustainable solutions to contemporary issues of waste. Bringing cross-sector experts together featured panelists span the worlds of interiors, architecture and, of course, motor manufacturing. Bentley's first episode is now live.

Common culprits

Recognizing the need for collaborative efforts, a group of industry leaders gathered during April's Milan Design Week in light of Bentley's "Rethinking Luxury Materials" live dialogue.

Though relatively truncated in duration, the 15-minute conversation covered a few essential areas of analysis, answering questions such as "How does sustainability impact the luxury market?" and "What is the value in imperfection?"

As the brand's latest presentation extends into the digital sphere, a recording of the "Bentley and *Dezeen* Lighthouse Talk: Rethinking Luxury Materials" event is making the rounds.

Episode one of Bentley's "Lighthouse Talks" series is now live

Guiding the conversation is *Dezeen's* editorial director Max Fraser, joined by a crew of design professionals, plus a few representatives of the brand's own home and auto verticals.

The creative minds wasted no time in answering a kickstarting prompt of what luxury means today, naming characteristics such as authenticity while pushing the luxury industry's forward-thinking nature to the forefront, in the presence of a live studio audience.

"For me, it's something that really exudes quality," says Chris Cooke, head of design collaborations at Bentley, in the

video.

"I think it needs to be something that is ultimately unique and beautiful," Mr. Cooke said. "But I think the real key message with what makes a luxury material a luxury material is human interaction, human investment."

Panelists go on to outline the use of rare woods and leathers, listing examples of the types of high-impact materials frequently tapped for bespoke commissions as endemic to the issue of climate change.

Overall, the group makes clear that the facilitation of a switch to eco-friendly biomaterials is key.

Producing many of the alternative fabrications discussed during Bentley's event would beget an emission-less reality, one that ultimately aims to induce less harm on the planet.

Experts stress that these processes would still enable the preservation of values like craftsmanship to survive.



The slabs Ms. Zappala speaks of maintain an antique, leather-like effect and are made from cellulose, a less resource-heavy, lab-grown variety. Image credit: Bentley Motors

"This year we worked with [a] beautiful material which is a paper factor," says Monique Zappala, creative director of art at Bentley Home, in the video.

"Behind this, there [are] hands, there's someone that's molding this."

Dubbed "paper marble," the slabs Ms. Zappala speaks of maintain an antique, leather-like effect and are made from cellulose, a less resource-heavy, lab-grown variety.

Lessening luxury's impact

In the interest of prioritizing supply chain circularity, plenty of luxury players have ventured into alternatives as of late.

In 2019, the Porsche Taycan became the namesake brand's first leather-free feat, opting instead to integrate recycled materials ([see story](#)).

Two years later, the Stuttgart-based automaker introduced the interior option for its entire fleet as an alternative to the company's standard fitted partial leather interior, adding to a long list of customizable facets available to clients.

German automaker BMW joined this cohort more recently, announcing last week that the brand's first cars with a vegan, leather-free interior will release to the public later this year ([see story](#)).

Interestingly, the normalization of surface-level imperfections that are inherent to the use of materials including, say, cellulose, could prove to be a challenge to progress on the luxury auto front.

"Now, our clients at least and I would say they are ahead of the curve, whether in commercial or in private are looking certainly at how to be sustainable," says Ilse Crawford, designer and founder of British interior and furniture firm Studioilse, in Bentley's video.

"At the same time, they also want it, usually to be rather sophisticated."