

Model No. wants to be a model for making sustainable furnishings



by Julie A. Palm 🕒 April 27, 2022

When Model No. was founded four years ago, it started with a goal of making sustainable products.

The “high-end design, craftsmanship and comfort” of its furniture lines followed, says Kevin Wildes, senior vice president of product development and design of the company, which is based in Oakland, California.



The Platform upholstery line is made with latex, wool and “ethically sourced duck feathers,” the company says.

“At Model No. we want everyone to rethink the business of furniture,” he says. “... We believe that being conscientious about how you can select furniture will lead to healthier environments and healthier clients and significantly improve the health of the planet.”

“FARM-TO-TABLE FURNISHINGS”

The company’s manufacturing process is a mix of high-tech (3D printing, digital fabrication) and handcrafting (mortise and tenon joinery, hand-applied finishes), using sustainable materials, all domestically sourced except the latex in its upholstery.

And sustainability is at the core of every production process, too.

Every piece in the **Model No.** line is made to order in what the company calls its “micro-factory” in Oakland. By limiting inventory and eliminating overseas shipping, the company can reduce its carbon footprint. But the bespoke production model can be scaled as needed, able to fulfill an interior designer’s request for a few pieces or a retailer’s larger order, Wildes says. Delivery times generally are from eight to 12 weeks.

“Digital production gives us a competitive advantage,” he says. “It gives us the ability to produce on demand and customize products.”



Model No. also is working to create a circular manufacturing process that will allow it to reclaim and reuse materials in its furnishings when they come to the end of their useful lives.

Model No.’s original mission to build sustainable products helps explain what at first may seem like a split personality in the company’s very different core product lines: 3D-printed furniture and handcrafted upholstered seating.

Let’s start with the outdoor line, which is grouped into two collections, Cynara and Solis. Both feature pieces 3D printed from a polylactic acid, or polylactide — a type of polyester made from plant starches like corn or sugar beet pulp. The resin, made from leftover food waste, can be produced with a low-gloss or high-gloss finish. The company also can print with a recycled wood substrate.

Model No. pairs the PLA components with hardwoods certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, using mortise and tenon joinery to build the wood frames and tabletops. It finishes them with organic oils.

Furniture made from the upcycled plant material is lightweight and durable, and Model No. has built useful features into a number of pieces. For instance, the Solis coffee table features a removable top, revealing storage space for pillows or throws, and includes leveling glides on the base so the table can sit firmly on an uneven patio. (The coffee table retails for \$2,570 on the company’s website.) The Cynara table, made of hardwood with no PLA components, features a removable center panel for displaying flowers, beverages or appetizers (\$4,320).



The resin pellets used to create the 3D-printed pieces is made from leftover food waste.

For now, the 3D-printed outdoor collections are available in white (for the PLA components) with cherry wood finishes. The warm woods, neutral colorway and sleek lines allow the pieces to fit comfortably into designs from modern farmhouse to earthy minimalism.

“With our current plant-based 3D printing and domestically sourced wood, we started with a limited palette for launch, but we will be expanding options as we grow the line. We are also researching alternative sustainable 3D-printing materials that may include recycled plastics, significantly increasing our color options,” Wildes says.

The company also offers indoor tables, desks, credenzas and chairs in wood and wood/PLA combinations, as well as accessories such as planters, bins, vases, hooks and shelves. Woods for those products include beech, walnut and oak, and customers can choose from a broader range of colors for the 3D-printed components. The company offers miniatures for customers who want to get a better feel for the products before placing an order.⁹

Model No. has plans to expand the outdoor lines and to introduce 3D-printed lighting, too. Visitors to its space during the Spring High Point Market got a sneak peek of some new pendants.

SUSTAINABLE UPHOLSTERED SEATING

Model No.'s Platform upholstery line is handcrafted without the PLA resin found in the 3D-printed furnishings. It includes two-piece and three-piece sofas, a chair and ottoman that can be grouped into sectionals.



Phillip Raub, chief executive officer, brings experience in online retail and consumer brands to Model No.

Customers can choose from two woods, two leg styles, three panel designs and nine fabric colors. The Platform chair retails for \$8,740.

As with its outdoor furnishings and case goods, the frames are made of FSC-certified hardwoods, using mortise and tenon joinery and finished with linseed oil and water-based varnish. Cushions are made of latex that meets the [Global Organic Latex Standard](#) and "ethically sourced duck feathers," according to the company. Fabrics include premium wool and a blended rayon/acrylic made with upcycled materials.

Model No. plans to expand its upholstery line "to provide more options for more types of customers," Wildes says.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Founder Vani Koshla doesn't have a background in home furnishings or retail. She earned degrees in computer science and civil engineering from Stanford University and worked as a software engineer. But Jeffrey McGrew, co-founder and chief technology officer, is an architect and co-founder of Because We Can, an architecture design-build studio in Oakland. And the Model No. team includes executives with retail and home furnishings experience. Of note: Chief Executive Officer Phillip Raub founded software-powered retailer b8ta and serves on the boards of tech-driven consumer companies including the barber chain Cutbox. Wildes has held a number of executive sales and marketing posts, including at Home Depot and Mohawk Industries.

The company's first customers included architects and interior designers and those are its prime focus. "As we continue to tell our story and explain our mission, we have been encouraged by the growing number of designers and companies considering how their furniture choices impact our planet," Wildes says.

But Model No. also sees "significant opportunities in the hospitality, workplace and retail sectors," he adds.

The company recently has begun showing at furniture markets. The spring show in High Point demonstrated "how much work there's yet to be done to help retailers achieve their sustainability goals," Wildes says.

The company also will show at the [International Contemporary Furniture Fair](#) May 15-17 in New York and other regional trade fairs in the coming year, he says.⁹