

Treasured trash: UK waste gets new lease of life

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Staff with Upcircle, a British cosmetic company creating skincare products with leftover natural ingredients, collect used coffee grounds for repurposing in south London.

From facial scrubs using coffee grounds to clothes made from plastic

bottles and furniture decorated with agave fibres, efforts to upcycle or repurpose waste products are gaining traction in Britain.

Every day a bike courier for the skincare brand Upcircle visits 25 cafes in London and collects some 100 kg (220 pounds) of [coffee](#) grounds that would otherwise be thrown away.

Set up six years ago by Anna Brightman and her brother Will Brightman, Upcircle reuses the coffee grounds to make [beauty products](#), adding ingredients such as camomile infusions or a powder made from olive stones.

The siblings took the plunge to set up their own business after working for multinational companies.

"I wanted to do something that was closer to my heart," Anna Brightman told AFP.

"It was my brother who had the initial inspiration when asking out of curiosity at the [coffee shop](#) where he was going every day what happened to the coffee grounds," she said.

"He was shocked to learn the coffee was disposed of at a landfill and they had to pay on top for it."

She joked that she and her brother have since "made a name (for themselves) as the crazy siblings collecting coffee around London and making cosmetics".

Once the coffee collections got going, "people started to contact us with all types of by-products," Anna said, noting more than 15 of them are now incorporated into their range.

Among these are water from making concentrated fruit juices, fading flowers that get thrown away by florists and leftover chai spices.



The used grounds, which would otherwise be thrown away, can be redeployed to make facial scrubs.

'Not gross'

Upcircle pay for some of these ingredients, though the coffee grounds, for example, are free. But the logistics involved in collecting them can be complex and costly.

Every year, half a million tonnes of coffee grounds are thrown away in

the UK and the firm claims to have recycled 400 tonnes to date.

Nevertheless, the idea of marketing a beauty product made from "trash" initially got a thumbs-down from industry insiders, Anna Brightman admitted.

She said they have to work to get the message across that "these ingredients we are working with are not gross, old or unclean".

Younger people are "more open to the idea of the circular economy", she added.

"For obvious reasons, they are concerned about the future of our planet".

Used coffee grounds work better as a skin care ingredient than dry ones, said Barbara Scott-Atkinson, the formulator for Upcircle's products.



UpCircle co-founder Anna Brightman says younger people are more open to the idea of a circular economy as they are "concerned about the future of our planet"

"In the UK, we recycle 15 percent of our waste, the rest is incinerated or put in landfill", said the exhibition's curator Gemma Curtin.

The Design Museum exhibition also shows chairs made from old fridges, baskets decorated with fishnets recovered from the ocean and creations by fashion designers, such as Stella McCartney and Phoebe English, who use recycling.

Curtin added this prompts visitors to question what is really "luxury"?

The exhibition's final room shows furniture and building blocks made of takeaway coffee cups. In Britain alone, 2.5 billion of these are thrown away each year, with their thin plastic coating making them impossible to recycle.

The huge amounts of plastics being made and then thrown away globally have prompted scientists to call for urgent production caps.

The United Nations will hold a meeting on tackling plastic pollution in Nairobi later this month, a potential prelude to talks on a worldwide plastics treaty.

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