Sustainability Report 2020

vitra.


Company

Ecological footprint

Circular economy

Transparency

Vitra is dedicated to sustainably improving the quality of homes, offices and public spaces through the power of design. Vitra's products and concepts are developed at its Swiss headquarters in an intensive design process, which combines the company's engineering expertise with the creative ingenuity of leading international designers. This leads to interior concepts, furnishings and accessories that are both functional and inspiring. Longevity of materials, construction and aesthetics is the guiding principle, as demonstrated by Vitra's line of classics – many in continuous production since the 1950s.

Vitra has defined three goals for the coming years:

1. By 2030 Vitra will be a net positive company based on all the indicators of its ecological footprint.
2. By 2030 Vitra will follow every product over its entire lifespan, ensuring the longest possible use and facilitating its recycling and disposal.
3. By 2030 customers will be able to make their purchasing decisions based on detailed information as to where and how a product has been manufactured and which partners were involved.

Initiatives like the Vitra Campus architecture, the Vitra Design Museum, workshops, publications, collections and archives are all integral elements of Vitra. They provide innovative ideas and lend greater depth to the company's understanding of design. Vitra's headquarters are in Birsfelden, Switzerland. The company has production facilities in Weil am Rhein (Germany), Szombathely (Hungary) and in Sugito (Japan) for the Asian market.

Additional information about the company can be found at www.vitra.com.


Understanding of
sustainability

Left to right: Charles Eames, Erika and Willi Fehlbaum (founders of Vitra) and Ray Eames at the Eames Office, 1960s © Eames Office, LLC

The close and long collaboration with Charles and Ray Eames has shaped Vitra in significant ways. Carrying on the tradition of thinking espoused by the designer couple, the company places an emphasis on the durability and longevity of products as part of its contribution to sustainable development, and avoids stylistic trends. This is most clearly exemplified by the classic designs in Vitra's portfolio, whose lasting functionality and timeless aesthetic keep them up to date and in active use for decades. They retain their value on the secondary market, changing owners and perhaps even ending up in a collection.

Furnishings that meet the highest functional and aesthetic standards bring added value and enrichment to human living and working environments. As integral elements of its overall development, production and sales processes, Vitra aims to leave the smallest possible ecological footprint, anticipate scenarios at the end of the product's lifespan, and promote healthy and sustainable working conditions not only within the company, but also amongst partners and suppliers. The company's relationships with employees, partners, architects, suppliers and customers are extremely important and should be lasting, as well as beneficial to all parties involved.

Sustainability principles

Sustainability as an attitude

Vitra practises a culture of care and diligence.

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Products that endure

It should be possible to pass Vitra products on from one generation to the next.

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Doing what is right for the long term

Vitra takes an in-depth approach and strives to get to the heart of the matter.

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Considering the complete life cycle

Products can be repaired, resold or even donated for further use.

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Expanding the percentage of recyclable and recycled materials

Before a new material is used, all the pros and cons are thoroughly evaluated.

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Maintaining long-term partnerships

Vitra works with like-minded regional partners.

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Constant self-assessment

Vitra is always increasing its knowledge.

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Continuing the cultural mission

Vitra conveys its philosophy and expertise through architecture, exhibitions, publications and workshops.

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Sustainability
as an attitude

Sustainability is not a project, but a corporate attitude that finds expression in every aspect of Vitra's work. This is evident in whom Vitra employs (43 nationalities, 41% women in management positions, two-thirds female Group Management) and in how Vitra supports its employees (such as with a company daycare centre). It is visible in how Vitra designs the campus and renders it accessible to the public (for example the Oudolf Garten). It is manifested in how Vitra develops and manufactures its products, in where Vitra sources its raw materials and in how Vitra organises its supply chain. It is attested by the manner in which Vitra operates its buildings on the campus (with energy from hydropower), and how it regards the latest insights into the impact of corporate action as opportunities for further development.

The 'Vitra Policy' – the company's code of conduct – formulates a common understanding of respectful and responsible behaviour to be adopted among Vitra employees and also in their dealings with society and the environment. Its contents include the central aspects of ISO 26000. Training courses for employees on such topics as competition law, occupational safety, data protection and more ensure consistent practices within these guidelines.

The standards to which Vitra holds itself naturally apply to its partners and suppliers as well. The supplier 'Code of Conduct' is the basis for trustworthy cooperation with partners along the supply and value chains. Compliance is evaluated on a yearly basis, supported by on-site audits.

Vitra's core expertise is to create products and concepts for top quality work environments. The training and further development of employees in an inspirational setting that promotes creativity, productivity and well-being is therefore a key priority. One of Vitra's goals is to provide healthy and future-oriented work conditions for all staff – offering employees what it achieves for its customers.

Interest in design and architecture is encouraged among Vitra employees by giving them and their families reduced admission to cultural activities sponsored by the company.

Vitra Group Management


Products
that endure

To develop products that last as long as possible, short-lived trends are avoided and non-essential details are omitted. Aesthetic longevity cannot be achieved without high-quality design, superior manufacturing methods and premium materials.

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Vitra has been manufacturing the Lounge Chair by Charles and Ray Eames using the same methods since the 1950s

Rolf Fehlbaum, Vitra Chairman Emeritus

‘A classic is not a classic from the very beginning. It starts by breaking the mould. It doesn’t become a classic by conforming to established norms; instead, it questions the established norms. A classic becomes a classic because it prevails: first over older products that already exist, and then over all of the new products that attempt to supplant it. Though it hails from a different era, a classic remains contemporary and current. It is an icon without trying to be iconic. It possesses the qualities of an artwork but never presumes to be art. It is forever fresh. When presented for the first time, it was new – and it will stay new until another product once again breaks the mould and challenges the established norms. It is important to Vitra to produce these outstanding products from the past for as long as they remain relevant. At the same time, we develop new products together with the most talented designers of our day – in the hope that some of them will become the classics of tomorrow.’

– Rolf Fehlbaum, Vitra Chairman Emeritus


Doing what is right
for the long term

Sustainable product development is complex: research, evaluation, experimentation, scrapping ideas and starting over again. Materials, production routes, packaging, transport, recycling and waste disposal must be taken into consideration. Development processes at Vitra take slightly longer as the best solutions are never rushed.

Product innovation

Vitra's engineering guidelines aim to enable good design through innovative manufacturing techniques.

1988
· Conversion to CFC-free polyurethane foam
-

1991
· Solvent-containing adhesives replaced by dispersion adhesives in upholstery applications
-

1993
· Production of the Eames Shell Chair in fibreglass is discontinued for occupational safety and environmental reasons
-

1999
· Exclusive use of TGIC-free coating powder on all Standard Chairs and the Airline seating system
· Production of Eames Shell Chair resumed with seat shells made of plastic polypropylene, a new recyclable material
-

2001
· Acquisition of the first powder coating system for MDF furniture in Germany to optimise material consumption
-

2008
· Blue Angel certification for MedaPal, the first office swivel chair in the world to earn this label. Additional models are continuously being certified.
-

2009
· Conversion to Cr(VI)-free surfaces for 80% of all screws and bolts
-

2011
· Tip Ton is awarded the Good Design Award 2011; chair is 97% recyclable
-

2014
· Renewed production of the iconic Landi Chair made of aluminium, consisting of 76% recycled material and 100% recyclable
-

2018
· Relaunch of the Eames Shell Chair made of fibreglass using a high-tech production process based on a closed system, which inhibits emissions of styrene vapours and fine glass dust. Production waste is minimised; the shells can be recycled in the cement industry at the end of the product life.
-

2019
· New options introduced to exchange parts of the Fiberglass Chairs and Plastic Chairs, as well as the launch of a return programme to properly recycle the chairs
-

2020
· Introduction of Tip Ton RE and Toolbox RE as first Vitra products made from recycled plastic (sourced from German household waste collected in the 'Yellow bag')
· Launch of Leather Premium F, whose eco-friendly tanning process stems from the use of olive leaves

‘Vitra’s greatest contribution to sustainability is the creation of products that omit non-essential elements and last a long time. Our roots in modern design would allow nothing else.’

- Nora Fehlbaum, Vitra CEO

Nora Fehlbaum, Vitra CEO


Considering the
complete life cycle

The end of a product's life is always a sad occasion. To ensure that Vitra products remain in circulation for as long as possible, they are designed to make reutilisation easy. Repairs, take-back programmes and extended warranties promote preservation. And in Vitra Circle Stores, used Vitra products are repurchased, restored and returned to use.

Vitra Circle Store near Frankfurt am Main, Germany


Expanding the
percentage of recyclable
and recycled materials

‘We are always seeking optimal solutions and strive to continuously develop our products – not only in terms of their aesthetic form, but also with regard to materials. When we come across a new, more sustainable material that meets our quality criteria and upholds our rigorous tests, we execute suitable products in that material.’

– Nora Fehlbaum, Vitra CEO

A syrup extracted from olive leaves is used as the tanning agent for Leather Premium F

Christian Grosen Interview

An interview with Chief Design Officer *Christian Grosen* about *Tip Ton RE* made from local upcycled household waste

Christian Grosen, Vitra Chief Design Officer

Producing long-lasting products has been Vitra's primary contribution to sustainability since its beginnings. This holistic approach was actively expanded in the mid-1980s by reducing energy usage and investing in renewables at Vitra's factories and offices. Raw materials have been assessed to exclude those that depend on hazardous or overly energy-intensive processes. Ninety percent of the aluminium used in Vitra products is recycled, and leather and cork are sourced from like-minded partners in Europe.
In regard to plastics, the company has relied on the logic that sourcing the best quality materials help to keep the objects it produces at the apex of the value chain. Making durable objects, tomorrow's heirlooms, is far removed from the throwaway culture that generates plastic waste. Take-back and refurbishment services further extend the lifespan of products. Plastic is a cornerstone material in Vitra's history. The first product developed by the Swiss manufacturer in collaboration with a designer was the Panton Chair, which depends on the unique strength of a synthetic polymer for the sinuous cantilevered form that made it an iconic design of the 1960s.
Now, though, the company is issuing its first recycled plastic chair; a version of the Tip Ton model designed by Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby in 2011. Tip Ton is famous for incorporating in its moulded form something other manufacturers had only been able to offer via complex mechanisms: allowing users to change the seat angle for better task concentration.
The Tip Ton RE uses 3.6 kg of recycled polypropylene – which only months before might have been shampoo bottles or yogurt pots in the homes of German consumers before reaching Vitra's injection moulding lines via the country's 'Yellow Bag' recycling scheme.
To coincide with the chair's launch, Chief Design Officer *Christian Grosen* shares some of the thinking behind *Tip Ton RE*.

For Vitra's first recycled plastic chair, was it a challenge re-engineering a design from the collection rather than starting with a new commission?
The reason for choosing Tip Ton was that it consists of a single material. Working on an existing product is a good way to gain experience with a new material. Though recycled polypropylene is still a type of plastic, it's different to work with. When dealing with an existing product, you already know the technical challenges that might crop up, and you can anticipate those from the beginning. Due to the combination of an almost archetypical appearance and its new idea for movement, the Tip Ton chair encapsulates what Vitra is all about – innovation and longevity. This made it a good place to start.

What was different about working with a recycled material?
The challenge was to make the chair strong enough, which is often the issue when working with recycled materials. That's why we added some fibreglass to strengthen the chair – while using as little as possible. Of course, when you combine fibreglass and polypropylene, it's harder to achieve a perfectly uniform surface. That requires a lot of experience, which is why it was an advantage to know about the mould flows and technical aspects of the chair's geometry. From the beginning, we decided that we didn't want the material to result in any compromises on the quality of the chair. We wanted it to achieve the same certifications as the existing Tip Ton chair. It was an iterative process to determine the minimum amount of glass fibre while still meeting the desired quality standards.

How did you decide on the source of the polypropylene?
When you work with recycled plastic, you can choose between post-consumer or post-industrial material, even ocean plastic; and there are advantages and disadvantages with each. What we liked about the Yellow Bag system was that it was very easy to trace the journey. You take packaging waste from households; you clean it and chop it up. Then you turn it into something new that lasts. Local sourcing is also important; the material is collected in Germany and the chair is made in northern Italy. The great majority of our suppliers are located in Germany or neighbouring European countries. This is also where most of our products are sold. You see companies producing injection-moulded chairs in Asia with material collected in Europe, so the material has to be transported there and back, inevitably leaving an unnecessary ecological footprint.

The original Tip Ton comes in eight colours, but the recycled version is only produced in dark grey.
Yes. It's very hard to separate the colours of recycled waste, so if you want to have specific colours, you have to add pigments or bleach, and we didn't want to do that. We wanted to keep the material as clean as possible, so what you see is what you get. There are tiny specks of other colours in the grey, which vary slightly from chair to chair. But for me that adds interest and pushes our perception of plastics. The slight variations in the recycled material add depth and give it a story, similar to how the structure of a piece of wood tells you about the tree's growth cycles.

How did you test the chair for strength and durability?
All Vitra products go through rigorous testing, depending on the norms we want to achieve. BIFMA [the US Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association] testing and European standards such as EN or GS require thousands of usage cycles to achieve certification. There

The *Tip Ton RE* uses 3.6 kg of recycled polypropylene – which only months before might have been shampoo bottles or yogurt pots in the homes of German consumers before reaching Vitra's injection moulding lines via the country's 'Yellow Bag' recycling scheme.

are machines that apply forces and drop tests with falling objects. We have invented some of our own tests, which are even more demanding. It was important that this chair achieve the same levels as the original version.

Making products for a circular economy places limitations on designers and manufacturers. How do you feel about those constraints?
It's a huge challenge. You need a different mindset, but we are adapting to it, because it's the way we need to think and act now. It's part of the designer's and company's responsibility. In this dialogue we push each other towards a more circular way of thinking. Testing new materials and processes can give you unknown results; it always leads to some kind of learning and adds to the knowledge base on the circular economy. This is different from finding only a new aesthetic or a new function. We view this as a very relevant challenge. The rules are not yet written, and we are writing ours as we go.

What have you personally learned from the *Tip Ton RE* project?
On a visit to the material supplier, I saw a bag of the shredded food packaging. It was before it had been washed, and you could still smell the food. It made me really happy to think of this waste being turned into a beautiful object that could be used for many years. The journey from disposable materials to lasting products really makes sense to me. I had another insight when I heard an interview with a leading acoustic engineer. He said there are no good or bad acoustics, just ones that are right or wrong for a given purpose. That reminds me of how we should use plastic. It's a fantastic material and will be with us for a long time, but there are right and wrong ways of using it. The critical thing is to understand when to use recycled plastic, when to use new material, and when to combine them to achieve products that people will keep and utilise for as long as possible.

Raw materials and other components

Aluminium: Aluminium is an extremely durable material, which can be completely recycled at the end of its useful life. Compared to primary aluminium, 94% less energy is required to produce recycled aluminium. Whenever possible, Vitra uses aluminium consisting of 95% recycled material.

Wood and wood-based materials: Wood is a natural material that finds extensive use in Vitra products – taking many different forms such as veneer, MDF, particle board, paper, cardboard, solid wood etc. Vitra procures all of its wood and wood products from European suppliers. A vendor declaration is required for every type of wooden material utilised in a Vitra product, certifying compliance with the European Timber Regulation (EUTR). Vitra also pays attention to the sustainability of its supply sources. At Vitra, tropical wood is employed only for the Eames Lounge Chair and the Butterfly Chair, and is procured from FSC-certified sources. Wood-based materials such as particle board used by Vitra are processed from by-products of the lumber, construction and furniture industries.

Lacquers and adhesives: Vitra employs the technique of powder-coating to finish metal surfaces. Woods are either oiled or finished with water-based, highly cross-linked polyurethane lacquers. When exceptional cases require the use of adhesives, preference is given to solvent-free products.

Plastic: As a manufacturer of long-lasting products with decades of experience in the development and processing of plastics, Vitra has devoted intense scrutiny to this material in the context of its approach to sustainability. Plastic is regarded by many as the most innovative material of the twentieth century. It can be moulded into any shape and enables innovative designs and technical concepts. The physical properties of plastic can be precisely determined by its chemical composition – from very stiff to ultra-soft. Moreover, plastic is long-lasting, hygienic and inexpensive. The economic growth and widespread accessibility to consumer products that marked the twentieth century would not have been possible without plastic. As a responsible manufacturer, Vitra is committed to using plastic wisely and limiting its impact on the environment for future generations. This motivates Vitra's development of new products made from recycled materials whenever possible, along with its ongoing assessment of the potential for existing products to be manufactured from recycling material, such as Tip Ton RE and Toolbox RE.

Leather: The leather for Vitra products is obtained from cowhides that are a by-product of cattle breeding for food production. Tanners must comply with strict environmental regulations when manufacturing leather, leading to the development of state-of-the-art technologies to ensure safe, environmentally friendly processes. In 2020 Vitra introduced the new Leather Premium F, which is processed with an innovative tanning agent extracted from olive tree leaves, a waste product of the olive harvest. In addition to the eco-friendly tanning method, Vitra will be reducing its network of leather suppliers in 2021 to European regions, thereby minimising the environmental impact of breeding and transport. A neutral institute regularly tests whether the leather used by Vitra complies with the legally specified limits for PCB, aromatic amines derived from azo dyes, chrome VI compounds and formaldehyde.

Upholstery fabrics: Vitra sources its upholstery fabrics from a small selection of European textile manufacturers, mainly located in Germany and Italy, with whom the company has maintained long and close partnerships. The textiles are continually tested according to the criteria of established certificates, documenting their safety and ecological performance. While synthetic fibres were originally introduced to offset the disadvantages of natural materials (availability, technical properties), today they are examined to assess whether their use is purposeful and carefully measured. From 2021 onwards, Vitra will thus be successively increasing the proportion of synthetic fibres derived from recycled materials. Vitra does not offer any textiles that have been additionally treated with stain and dirt repellent. This decision is based on the ecological and health-related consequences associated with chemical treatments. Depending on the type of treatment, it can have detrimental effects in the production phase, when the product is used and/or after it reaches the end customer. Vitra places greater emphasis on the selection of high-quality textiles that meet the desired performance requirements by virtue of their natural characteristics (e.g. dirt resistance of wool).


Maintaining long-term
partnerships

As a result of its procurement policies and compliance with official certification programmes, Vitra ensures that the materials purchased meet its self-imposed conditions in regard to human rights and environmental standards. The company's products and materials are continuously analysed, and its methods are monitored and evaluated by independent external institutions.

In 2020, 46% of Vitra's suppliers were from Germany, 97% from Europe. As a globally active company, Vitra distributes its products to customers all over the world in the most resource-efficient way possible.

Vitra's quality standards can only be achieved through close partnerships with suppliers, which is why a dialogue based on trust is established from day one. These collaborative efforts are guided by principles of corporate responsibility, in particular as they relate to social aspects and environmental factors. Concrete steps include the communication of relevant criteria during the onboarding process, on-site audits, monthly monitoring procedures and an annual supplier evaluation. This is how Vitra nurtures long-term relationships with its suppliers.


Constant
self-assessment

At present there are no comprehensive benchmarks for measuring the environmental impact of a company, or even of individual products. This prompted Vitra to define ecological standards for its own products, ensuring that they not only fulfil the company's high standards but also global criteria for building certifications and sustainability norms – learning as it does so every day.

In addition to the internationally established company certification procedures for quality (ISO 9001) and environmental management (ISO 14001), Vitra also undergoes annual audits for responsible business conduct.

Blauer Engel · The Blue Angel (‚Blauer Engel') is the first and oldest environmental label worldwide for eco-friendly products and services. It promotes both environmental protection and consumer safety. Consequently certificates are only awarded to products and services that are ecologically sound from a comprehensive perspective. The evaluation process ensures that a certified product has no or only minimal impact on the environment and human health over the entire course of its lifespan (from manufacture to disposal).

GREENGUARD Gold · The internationally recognised label GREENGUARD was developed in 2001 by the 'GREENGUARD Environmental Institute'. Its aim is to protect human health and quality of life by reducing exposure to pollutants and improving indoor air conditions. GREENGUARD Gold-certified products can contribute to the environmental certification of buildings.

GS seal (Tested Safety) · The GS seal is issued to products that fulfil product safety regulations based on national and international norms as well as current technical standards. It ascertains that a product will not cause any damage while being used and assesses whether its components pose any health hazards.

EcoVadis · EcoVadis operates a collaborative platform to evaluate the corporate social responsibility of suppliers in global supply chains. Vitra has been a member since 2014 and is reevaluated annually in a detailed assessment process. In 2020, Vitra was awarded the EcoVadis Silver certificate.

Occupational safety · Vitra places the highest demands on every type of workplace in our company. The quality seal 'Sicher mit System' (systematic safety) awarded by the employers' liability insurance association attests to healthy and safe working conditions in all departments at all times.

Continuing the cultural mission

Vitra engages in a multitude of cultural activities above and beyond its business operations. A substantial portion of revenues is invested in preserving the cultural heritage of design and architecture. Vitra supports various institutions around the globe. Regular beneficiaries include the Eames Foundation, which is devoted to preserving the Eames House in Pacific Palisades, California, the Alvar Aalto Foundation in Finland, and the Barragan Foundation based in Switzerland.

The Vitra Design Museum, founded in 1989, is a major focus of the company's cultural commitment. It is not a company museum, but an internationally renowned, independent institution dedicated to the research and presentation of design and architecture. The Vitra Design Museum organises exhibitions, workshops and guided architectural tours. Its holdings include one of the world's largest collections of industrial furniture design, and it administers and maintains the estates of several major designers. It also produces publications on a broad spectrum of design and architectural topics. The diverse activities of the Vitra Design Museum have earned it worldwide respect as a model for private initiatives and independent institutions in the cultural sector.

Furthermore, the Vitra Campus is a place where design objects and architectural works are created and maintained, making topics of design, architecture and art accessible to the public. And the ongoing development of the Vitra Campus reveals the company's long-term commitment to its location in Weil am Rhein.

South end of the Vitra Campus with Zaha Hadid's Fire Station in the background and the Schaudepot by Herzog & de Meuron on the right

Architecture tour on the Vitra Campus

Biodiversity

Vitra has long advocated an ecological and responsible use of land. On the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein, paved roads and building footprints are counterbalanced by unsealed surfaces and plantings. Large natural flower meadows stretch between the buildings, particularly in the northern part of the campus, establishing a link to the agricultural landscape and vineyards of the neighbouring Tüllinger Hill.

2009
· One hundred cherry trees and 100 maple trees are newly planted on the Vitra Campus
-

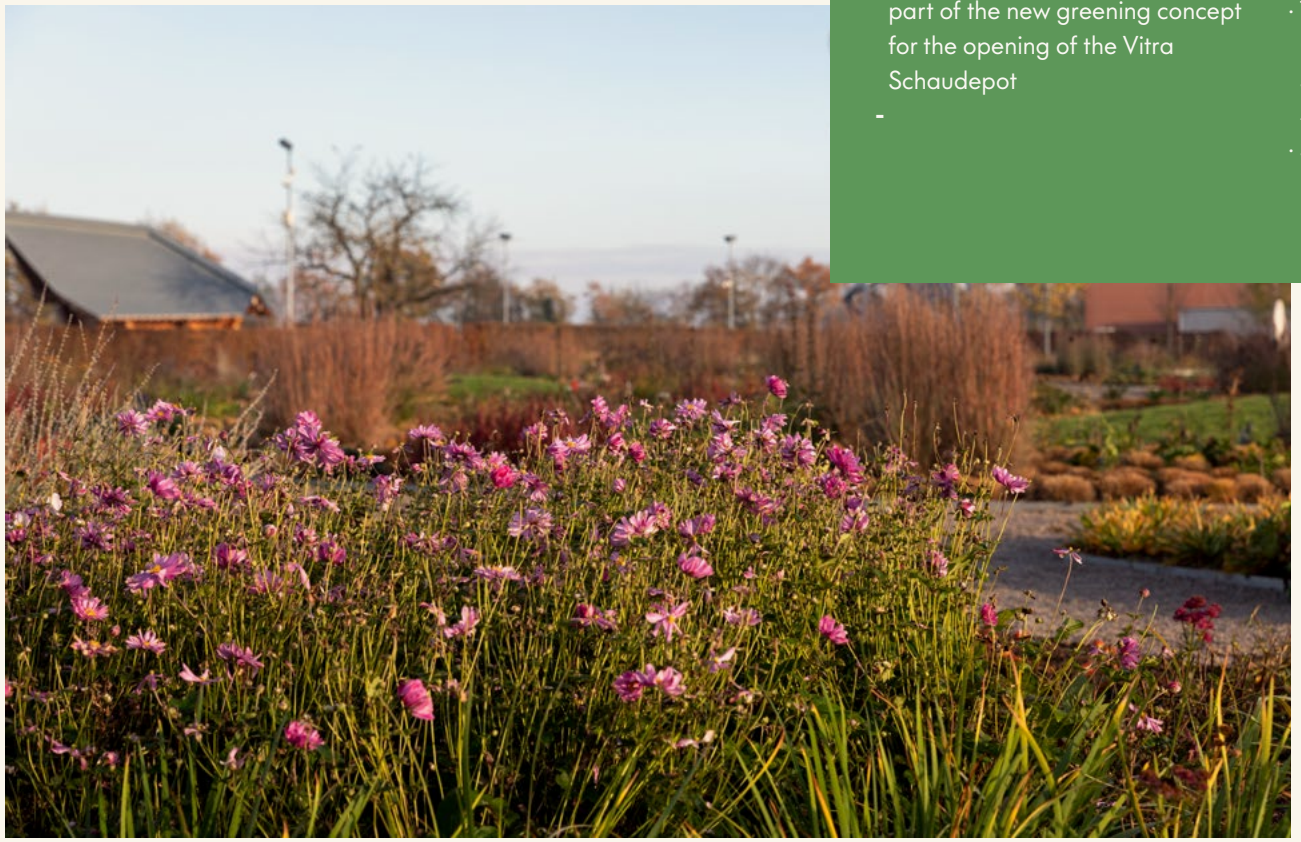
2014
· 980 m of hornbeam hedge newly planted along the Álvaro Siza Promenade and new layout of car park
-

2016
· Reduction of sealed paving as part of the new greening concept for the opening of the Vitra Schaudepot
-

2018
· At the Birsfelden headquarters, meadows with wildflowers are planted to enhance biodiversity. The project is being continuously expanded
-

2019
· Cherry trees are transplanted, instead of chopping them down, to make space for a new garden
-

2020
· The publicly accessible Oudolf Garten is laid out with some 30,000 plants over an area of 400 square metres
· 3 beehives are installed



Oudolf Garten in autumn

Interview with

Piet Oudolf

A new garden is taking shape in front of the VitraHaus, on the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein. It was planned by the Dutch garden designer *Piet Oudolf*, whose spontaneous and wild looking compositions of perennials and grasses have won him commissions all over the world, including the landscaping of the High Line park in New York.

Piet Oudolf

VitraHaus by Herzog & de Meuron and Oudolf Garten on the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein

‘I want people to lose themselves in the garden’ – *Piet Oudolf*

Piet Oudolf, today we were supposed to be wearing rubber boots and walking across a meadow together. Instead, we are both sitting in front of our computer screens. Are you at least spending more time than usual in your garden at home during these quite unusual weeks?
I’m working exclusively from home at the moment and am always surrounded by the garden, so in this respect, yes. I would actually like to go outside more, but we have too much to do. I’m currently organising my designs and drawings from the last 40 years so I can archive them. I’ve spent more than three weeks getting everything scanned.

Aside from that, you surely have a number of active projects going on. What’s the situation there?
They are at very different stages. Some are far enough along that the plants have already been put in the ground. Then there are others, such as in Detroit, where the planting hasn’t started yet. I’m unfortunately not able to oversee these in person at the moment, but I’m happy to have a good network of people that I trust and who have the knowledge to understand and implement my plans. They not only need to interpret the plans correctly, but also to be able to recognise the many different plants at a very young stage. When they’re just coming out of the pot, they’re not really showing yet. Only specialists are capable of this, and they’re not found on every corner.

In Weil am Rhein, the first plants are going in the ground over the coming weeks. Can you tell us how the garden will look next spring?
We won’t have to wait that long. Although it’s a so-called ‘Perennial Garden’ – a garden that comes back year after year – we’re using plants that grow and mature quickly. If we plant it now and the weather cooperates, the garden will already look good in September.

What about the design features of the garden?
I had numerous discussions with Rolf Fehlbaum and others at Vitra to give them an understanding of various design aspects that typify my work. We agreed that we wanted to create three or four different planted zones, each offering a distinct sensual experience. I also want people to lose themselves in the garden instead of just passing through it. That’s why I developed a system of small paths, without straight lines or a focal point at the end. You go around the corner, see a different perspective and can make a decision. Do you go to the right or to the left?

That almost sounds like one of those well-manicured mazes from the Baroque era. But considering your projects, such as the High Line in New York or the gardens at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, it will probably end up looking like a piece of wilderness.
At least what many people think of as wilderness. Wilderness is often glorified into a highly romanticised ideal. I try to turn these fantasies into reality. But my gardens are actually not wild at all. On the plans, you can see exactly where I have put every single plant. Everything is precisely composed.

How do you create such a wilderness?
We don’t need too many built structures because it’s all about the plants. They are the centre of attention. In Weil am Rhein, we’re using around 30,000. But these are not wild plants, like the ones promoted by the advocates of wild gardening back in the 1960s. Those were too wild and competitive. In the end, you were left with two or three plants that took over the garden and you

couldn't get rid of them. More than 30 years ago, a small group of people, including my wife and myself and our friend Henk Gerritsen, instead started to introduce plants that were underappreciated or had never been viewed as garden plants. Grasses, for example, that we knew from the meadows, but which no one put in their gardens before the 1980s. They look wild, but know how to behave.

What do you mean?
Each plant has its particular strengths and its place in the garden, but shouldn't restrict the others too much. Otherwise the balance in a garden will be disturbed. It's very important that the different plants work well together. Like in a community, or an ensemble of stage players. You can put them together in different roles. Each one 'performs' in its own way, but in the end an interesting play needs to emerge from it.

Listening to you, I get the impression that you're talking about people.
Perhaps I see more in plants than others do. When I look at them, I recognise characters with a kind of soul, independent personalities with a unique appearance and behaviour. I make use of these distinctions and put them together in specific compositions. For example, to provide a sensual experience in the garden all year round, I always try to find a balance between plants that are flowering and those that might be reduced to a seed head or skeleton.

Speaking of balance: on the Vitra Campus, you have these striking works of cosmopolitan architecture amidst a quiet, tranquil setting. To what extent does your garden respond to this situation?
I see the garden here neither as a contrast to the architecture nor as something that panders to the surroundings or vice versa. It is complementary in every respect. It is important to me to use the plants to draw attention from the open sky down to the ground, and thus to open up new perspectives – including on the surrounding buildings

Do you prefer to work in urban areas or in the countryside?
They each have their own charm. Somerset is in the middle of the countryside and works well. But my work usually has a much stronger impact in cities. On the one hand, because there's more of a contrast with the surroundings, and on the other, because I usually create urban projects in public spaces, where they are viewed by many more people. I like that. It's like art. You don't want to hide it. You want to have it in a museum, not in a private home.

Over the years, your own garden in Hummelo has attracted many people to the Dutch countryside.
True, but outside my own garden, I'm forced to deal with a completely different set of conditions, wishes and interests, as well as restrictions. This challenges and inspires me. Each new project is a playground for me. If I can implement it in a place where millions of people will pass by, all the better.

Why is that?
It's very important to me that people don't just see my gardens in pictures, but that they can experience the same thing that happens to me when I walk through a garden. I'm interested in the feelings that are triggered. I react very emotionally to plants, even more so than usual at the moment. This morning I was outside and was deeply moved by what I saw. This sensitivity might also be the reason why I can work so well with plants. From the very beginning, I have seen plants as a means of expressing myself and bringing out strong emotions in other people.

Does that make you an artist? If one believes your admirers, such as the gallery owner Iwan Wirth or the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, then you certainly are.
I leave it to others to say what I am. For some people, I'm just a gardener, while others think my work is art. There are certainly some parallels to art. I work with ideas and points of view, aesthetics, emotions, the way something affects the mind and touches people. But then again, I make something that is so fluid, so changeable. My work is never finished, but is always just the beginning of something. It's not making a painting and putting it on the wall. It's making a painting and letting it grow and decay.

But there are more and more people who want to have one, despite the fleeting nature of your 'paintings'. Does that surprise you?
Sometimes I wonder why I get so much attention and how it happened that I've been able to achieve everything I'd dreamed of. It's certainly to my advantage that I'm doing something that is relevant to the time we live in. Just think of the popularity of urban gardening or sustainably managed farms. Today people are forced to think differently about our environment. My years of experience help me here. Back in the 1980s, I dreamed of gardens that were less decorative and labour-intensive, but more resource-efficient, wild and emotionally poignant. Gardens in which plants that are out of flower wouldn't be instantly torn out, and where there would also be room for things that don't correspond to conventional ideals of beauty.

Was there also a political message behind it, a call for more sustainability?
It wasn't really a deliberate appeal for environmental protection, even if appears that way in retrospect. Even today, I don't want to tell people how to act. But if I can inspire an enthusiasm for plants through my work, of course I'm pleased. I rely more on inspiration than confrontation. Over the last 30 years, I've tried to offer an alternative to traditional landscape gardening and hopefully my projects and publications have contributed to the way people think about gardens today.

In this light, your success doesn't come as a surprise. In fact, it's a logical outcome of the path you've taken.
Yes, there's some truth to that. But not everything was planned. I've come a very long way from my parents' bar and restaurant to various odd jobs, and then switching to gardening when I was 25. Before that, I never had any idea about plants. In 1982 my wife and I started a nursery out of financial necessity, which would go on to become famous – but I did not receive my first public commission as a garden designer until 1996. So I didn't start with big ideas but with hard work. Maybe this is one of the reasons why it's sometimes difficult for me to call myself an artist.

One thing that definitely sets you apart from other artists is your openness when it comes to interventions in your work. At some point, you have to leave your gardens to those who will cultivate them. How easy is that for you?
I always oversee a garden until it reaches a certain maturity, and I typically have an image in mind of what it will look like in a few years. But I'm also aware that it constantly evolves. Plants grow and some will disappear, while others have to be changed. A garden is not a self-contained work. If I entrust the upkeep to people who basically share my idea of a garden, I can easily live with interventions and changes. After all, one day I'll be out of the picture, but my gardens will live on. I have had good experiences with people who love their profession and have a deep affection for plants. I would even say that my most successful projects were made successful by the gardeners who took care of them.


People

Vitra as an employer

Vitra devotes particular attention to work conditions and environments that are inspiring and therefore productive, and also strives to offer healthy and future-oriented employment relationships for all employees.

Vitra is convinced that the best results are achieved through team work, collaborating with colleagues of diverse education or training, backgrounds and interests. The goal is to allow for differences, while emphasising the uniting characteristics.

Vitra promotes life-long learning and advancement within the company, giving talented and motivated employees long-term perspectives.

Interest and curiosity in the company's cultural engagement is viewed as a foundation for Vitra's corporate success. To promote identification with Project Vitra, employees can regularly take part in activities related to the themes of design and architecture.

51% women

49% men

2010 Opening of company crèche at Birsfelden headquarters and cooperation with existing facility in Weil am Rhein

11,1 years average period of employment

Diversity is valuable

Specialists of both sexes with diverse educational backgrounds, from all over the world, work together on different tasks. Vitra encourages social interaction during working hours and leisure time – for example, employees and their families are offered reduced admission to cultural activities sponsored by the company. The cafeterias with a healthy range of food and beverages are designed as lively places of communication, and employees also regularly come together during staff parties, visits to the museum, concerts at Vitra Campus Night or family trips to the campus on Sundays for coffee and cake at the VitraHaus Café. .

67%
women in general management

43
different nationalities work at Vitra

36
different nationalities at the sites in Germany and Switzerland

Training and staff development

Vitra is committed to training: in 2020 Vitra employed 56 apprentices and students in 10 different vocational programmes – 100% of whom successfully completed their training, with many still working at the company.

Continuous employee development is of key importance at Vitra. A dedicated training department offers a comprehensive portfolio of statutory and more wide-ranging product and skills courses in the form of face-to-face sessions and e-learning modules.

Vitra has digitalised business processes and uses advanced IT systems. All employees receive targeted training to ensure efficient use of these tools.

56
apprentices and students

100%
of apprentices successfully completed their training

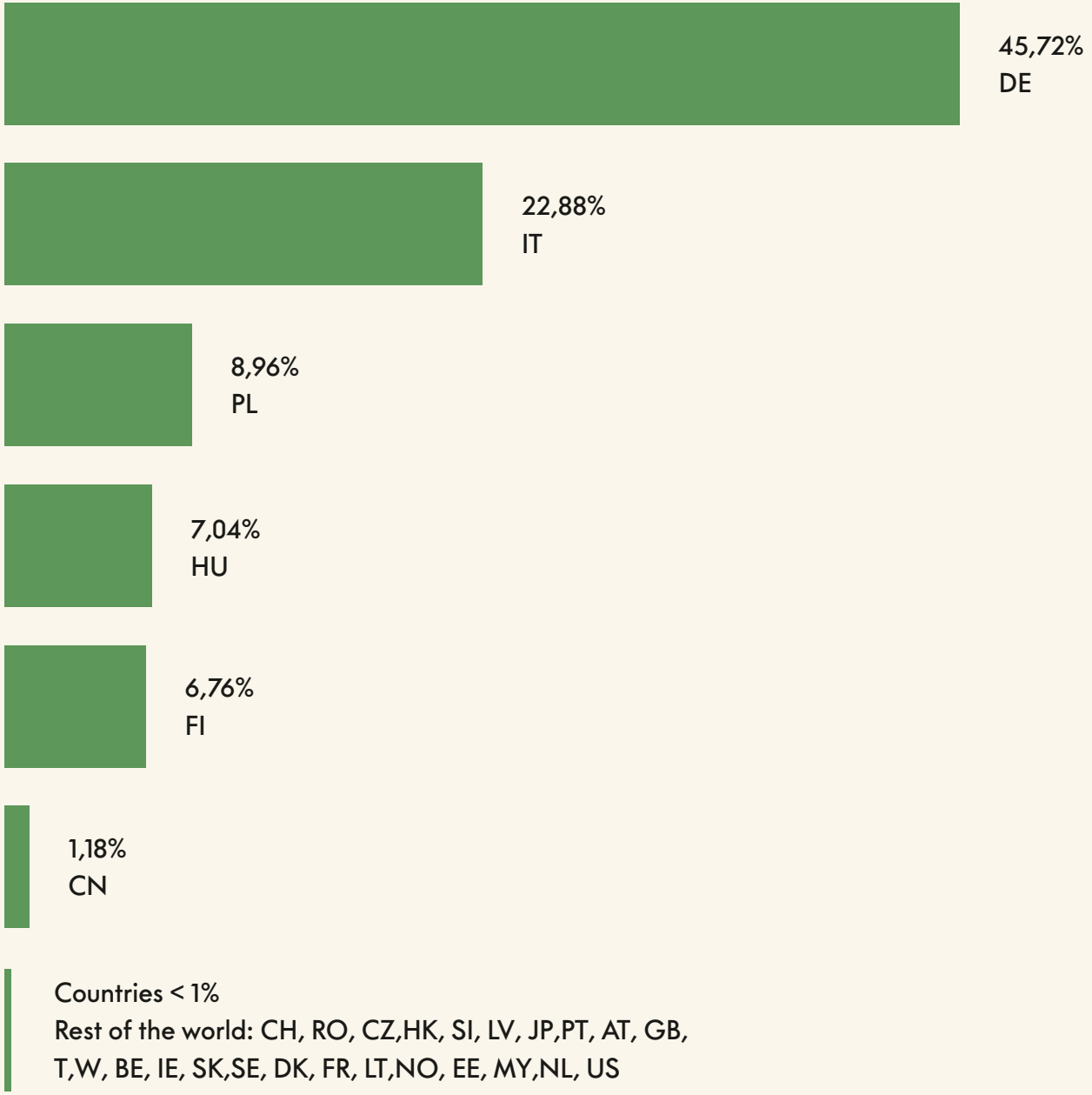
59%
of apprentices were taken on by the company

Facts and figures

Procurement

As a result of procurement policies and compliance with official certification programmes, Vitra ensures that the materials purchased meet its corporate conditions in regard to human rights and environmental standards. The company mainly purchases from suppliers in Europe, amongst other markets, as the European chemical regulation REACH guarantees environmental protection and the exclusion of child labour.

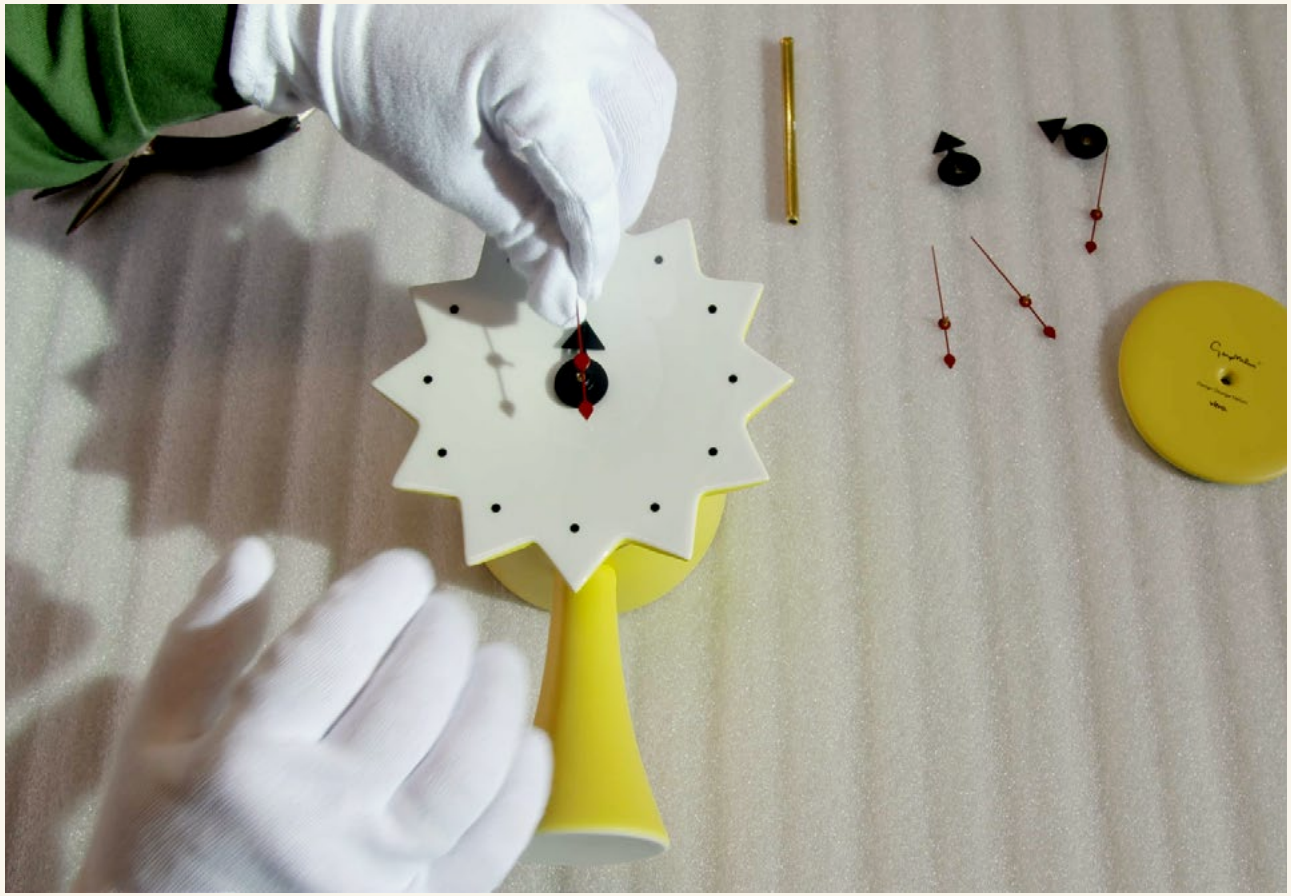
Products and materials are continuously analysed, and methods are monitored and evaluated by independent external institutions. In 2020, 45% of Vitra's suppliers were from Germany and 97% were based in Europe. As a company with global operations, Vitra also maintains a manufacturing facility outside of Europe – it is situated in Japan.



Supplier’s code of conduct

The aim of the code of conduct is to ensure that social and environmental standards are observed. It is therefore based on the conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of Children and on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UN Global Compact and the OECD directives for multinational companies. Compliance with all valid national and international laws or regulations, as well as industrial minimum standards, is also compulsory. Precedence is given to the most stringent requirements.

Vitra’s quality standards can only be achieved by working closely with its suppliers, which is why the company establishes a dialogue based on trust from the very beginning of every partnership. Good business practices are combined with the social and environmental aspects of sustainability to form the pillars of all collaborative efforts. Concrete steps include the communication of relevant criteria during the onboarding process, on-site audits, monthly monitoring procedures and an annual supplier evaluation.



Production and logistics

Besides being a place dedicated to the presentation of design and architecture, a social meeting point and a point of sale and product advice, the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein is Vitra's central production hub. Over the years, Vitra has introduced many environmental measures in its manufacturing plants and adopted a responsible approach to nature and natural resources.

Final assembly of Aluminium Chairs and Soft Pad Chairs on the Vitra Campus

Packaging and transport

The packaging of Vitra products should provide proper protection during transport with a minimum amount of material. The packaging concept is continually assessed and revised to take advantage of newer and more environmentally friendly materials.

Vitra's transport logistics are organised in such a way that lorries preferably only leave the production facilities with a full load. Overseas transport is handled by ship and, only in exceptional cases, by air freight. Special transports are avoided whenever possible.

The factory building designed by Nicolas Grimshaw on the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein

Energy efficiency

Every new building constructed by Vitra is equipped with the latest building technology. Vitra has been a member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für nachhaltiges Bauen (DGNB – German Sustainable Building Council) since 2007. Vitra has drawn all of its electricity for the production sites in Weil am Rhein and Neuenburg from hydropower sources since 2008, and this is also true of the company's headquarters in the Swiss town of Birsfelden since 2016. Photovoltaic panels mounted on the roofs of the production facilities generate solar power.

1996
· Installation of automatic high-speed doors in all buildings to reduce draughts and save energy

-

2000
· Insulation of roofs on industrial buildings improved

-

2001
· Installation of modern heating/ventilation controls in production areas
· Reduction of heating oil consumption through installation of a new boiler and burner
· Installation of a solar power system with an output of 47.52 kWp on the Vitra Campus

-

2008
· Solar power plant on the Vitra Campus expanded to achieve an output of 109.58 kWp
· Installation of a solar power system with an output of 120 kWp at the Neuenburg site
· Construction of a geothermal heat pump for the heating and cooling of the new logistics hall in Neuenburg

-

2009
· Installation of a geothermal heat pump for heating and cooling the VitraHaus
· Conversion to a recirculating ventilation system in the foaming plant's glue booth
· Conversion to 100% hydroelectric power at company headquarters in Birsfelden at the Weil am Rhein and Neuenburg sites

-

2010
· Installation of a combined heat and power unit that generates 50 kWp of electric power and 100 kWp of thermal power

-

2011
· Daylight-dependent lighting control in sections of the production facilities in Weil am Rhein

-

2012
· New building in Weil am Rhein equipped with a photovoltaic system (output: 436 kWp). LED technology adopted for outdoor lighting
· Installation of a photovoltaic system at company headquarters in Birsfelden (output: 376 kWp)
· Energy-efficient modernisation in connection with expansion of foaming plant
· Testing machines converted from pneumatic cylinders to servo drives

-

2013
· New double glazed windows with exterior solar shading on a building in Weil am Rhein
· Installation of a new refrigeration dryer

-

2016
· Conversion to 100% hydroelectric power at company headquarters in Birsfelden

-

2018
· Installation of an EV charging station on the Vitra Campus
· VitraHaus and an additional factory building converted to LED
· New heating system and replacement of window facade on west face of one factory building for more efficient thermal insulation

-

2019
· Optimisation of energy efficiency in various buildings through LED lighting and new windows

Waste management

Waste products are considered raw materials, provided they can be recycled. The more effectively that waste materials are separated, the more valuable they are for secondary utilisation. Vitra's aim is to produce as little waste as possible, and to use waste material to create other products wherever feasible.

The appropriate disposal of production waste, the separate collection of paper, plastic and metal, as well as their correct recycling are a matter of course.

	2018	2019	2020
Domestic waste	202,33 t	150,86 t	127,04 t
Paper and Cardboard	354,82 t	361,01 t	287,50 t
Wood	411,73 t	402,96 t	362,59 t
Films	33,18 t	102,72 t	73,58 t
Metal	31,50 t	73,88 t	43,44 t
Styrofoam	n/a	0,38 t	0,42 t
Hollow glass	n/a	7,50 t	2,7 t

Water management

Water is the most important resource on our planet. Vitra extracts water from groundwater reservoirs that form over time from seeping rainwater.

2009
· Construction of a rainwater seepage system for roughly 50,000 m² of sealed surface to reduce the burden on the wastewater treatment plant and to channel rainwater into a groundwater reservoir
-

2013
· Installation of a new water treatment plant
-

2018
· Electroplating transferred to long-term suppliers with a new closed water circulation system in Germany, where statutory regulations demand stringent threshold values and official monitoring to ensure compliance. Elimination of the biggest source of drinking water consumption and wastewater pollution at Vitra
-

2019
· Green spaces irrigated using water from Vitra's own well, without using drinking water from the public grid

Energy data and emissions

Fuel emissions (diesel)	Consumption in l	SO2 in kg	NOX in kg	Dust in kg	CH4 in kg	N2O in kg	CO2 equivalent in t	CO2 in t
2018	321.410	389	1.475	73	441	93	963	925
2019	288.987	350	1.326	65	396	84	865	831
2020	194.098	235	891	44	266	56	581	558
Heating oil emissions	in l							
2018	177.502	506	381	43	161	7	564	558
2019	209.553	596	450	51	190	8	666	659
2020	180.625	515	388	44	164	7	574	568
Power emissions (from hydropower)	in kWh							
2018	6.207.530	10	46	10	26		17	16
2019	7.478.161	12	56	12	31		21	20
2020	6.780.746	11	51	11	28		19	18
Natural gas emissions	in kWh							
2018	5.869.558	71	1.093	42	4.199	13	1.467	1.338
2019	4.053.482	49	755	29	1.467	9	1.013	924
2020	4.375.430	53	815	32	3.130	10	1.094	997

Total	CO2 equivalent in t
2018	3.011
2019	2.565
2020	2268

SO2 – Sulphur dioxide is a poisonous gas that results primarily from the burning of fuels containing sulphur (coal, petroleum). It contributes to acid rain.
NOx – Nitrogen oxides are a collective term for the gaseous oxides of nitrogen. They impair the respiratory system and contribute to the formation of acid rain. They result from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, petroleum).

Dust – Fine dust particles result from natural and anthropogenic sources, such as pollen, forest fires, the burning of wood, tyre/brake wear and tobacco smoke. The finer the dust particle, the greater its ability to pass into the lungs and the more dangerous it is.
CH4 – Methane is a colourless and odourless combustible gas. It results from biological and geological processes and is a main component of petroleum. Methane is a significant greenhouse gas.
N2O – Nitrous oxide is a colourless gas belonging to the group of nitrogen oxides. It is also known under the common name laughing gas. It acts as a greenhouse gas.
CO2-equivalent indicates how much a specified amount of a greenhouse gas contributes to the greenhouse effect. CO2 serves as a comparative value. For instance, the CO2 equivalent of methane is 25, i.e. its greenhouse effect per kilogram is 25 times greater than that of CO2.
CO2 – Carbon dioxide is a natural component of air. It results from the metabolism of living creatures as well as from the burning of substances containing carbon. It is a major contributor to the greenhouse effect.

Contact

A company's sustainable development relies
on dialogue with an interested public.
You may contact us at **sustainability@vitra.com**
We look forward to hearing from you.

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Interview with Christian Grosen: Louis Wustemann;
Interview with Piet Oudolf: David Streiff Corti.

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