



The Buyer's View



CREDIT: NOVA EMPRESA.

The sweet smell of success

Tanneries, like all suppliers, are searching for extra ways to add value to their products in the hope that this will help them find new customers and keep on board the ones they have already.

Nova Empresa, a Portuguese company based in the northern city of Porto, caused something of a stir at the Lineapelle exhibition in Bologna in the autumn with its new idea, Fragrant Leather.

No one would deny that the fragrance of leather is already one of its most attractive qualities. In recent months, Canadian upholstery manufacturer Greatex Mills has worked with packaging supplier Cascades to use special leather-scented paper to make sure its consignments create the best possible first impression when customers open the box. At the time, company president, Sheldon Lewis, said he felt sure that within three years everyone selling leather furniture would use this product in their packaging.

But the idea behind Fragrant Leather is not to make the leather smell more of leather. The Nova Empresa initiative has much in common with recent developments that have taken place in the textile world, in which companies have

used microencapsulation technology to add the fragrance and mind-and-body benefits of essential oils to fibres such as Merino wool. This is part of what fashion brands and retailers the world over have labelled as the "consumer wellness trend", and Nova Empresa sees every reason why leather should play its part in it.

Tutti frutti

Dr Luisa Sousa, company director and technical manager, says that adding aromatherapy-inspired fragrances to leather is a way of enhancing its natural characteristics. Natural oils such as rosemary and lavender feature in the collection because of their relaxing properties. Lighter, fruitier fragrances come from strawberry, orange and lemon oil, while refreshing and stimulating mint is also on offer.

The company has added tiny amounts of these oils in capsules that are on the surface of and inside the leather at the micro- and even nano-level. As the surface of the leather flexes, the fragrance of the oil is released. Dr Sousa argues that this abrasion will take place only gradually, making this enhanced quality her company has added to the leather long-lasting.

To add even more to the impact of Fragrant Leather, the company has decided to produce the material, at the moment nubuck, in bright colours that link logically to the fragrance wherever possible.

It's too soon to say exactly how widely the idea will catch on, but Fragrant Leather certainly caught the eye, and the nose, of a number of buyers at Lineapelle, some of whom have already followed up with orders.

Special needs

One is Lederhandel Andreas Donth, a specialist supplier of material (linings, insoles, special membranes and, naturally, leather) to companies making footwear and other equipment for people with special orthopaedic needs. This small company has its base in the village of Mitterndorf in Lower Austria and Mr Donth travels all over the country to deliver orders to 300 or so specialist footwear manufacturers. He has a second small group of clients among custom-made footwear manufacturers in different parts of Austria, but it's the orthopaedic specialists—who are constantly on the look-out for new ways to ease the pain and suffering of people who have problems ➤



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with their legs or feet, including people with diabetes—that he believes will benefit most from the innovation from Portugal.

He explains that he had long thought an idea like Fragrant Leather could work well for people with foot problems. “It’s the law in Austria that the leather we supply for footwear must be guaranteed not to harm the foot, but this goes further,” he says. “People with diabetes often have sores or other problems on their feet that can take a long time to heal. Perhaps the essential oils can help them heal more quickly.” They certainly ought to help neutralise any unpleasant odours from foot-wound secretions.

Nova Empresa has been a supplier to Lederhandel Andreas Donth for around two years and they had arranged a routine



Porto-based Atlanta Moccasin offers shoes for men, women and children in 100 colours.
CREDIT: ATLANTA MOCCASSIN.



The first moccasins from Atlanta to be made from Fragrant Leather will go on display at the Pitti Bimbo and Magic Kids exhibitions at the start of the year, with lemon, orange, strawberry and chocolate as the flavours of choice.

CREDIT: ATLANTA MOCCASSIN.



meeting to discuss future orders at the Lineapelle event. When Mr Donth saw and smelled the new product range he immediately commented that he had been looking for material like this for years. “Nobody wanted to make it and sell it to us,” he complains. “We don’t sell so many square-metres of leather, so we only wanted to order a small quantity and perhaps that wasn’t attractive enough to suppliers.”

He describes the smell that comes from the leather as easily recognisable and “not at all chemical”. It reminds him more of the aroma of the type of oil you put in candle-burners than, say, that of perfumed

soap. On the question of how long the effect might last on the leather, he says the samples he has to show his customers have now been battering about Austria for months in his van and still offer up an intense aroma when rubbed.

The orthopaedic footwear manufacturers that have come into contact with the samples have reacted positively; Mr Donth has sent a first order to Portugal and is looking forward to delivering Fragrant Leather to his clients.

Closer to home, there has also been interest from Atlanta Moccasins, a specialist in handmade footwear based, like Nova Empresa, in Porto. Its moccasins come in 100 colours and are available in footwear stores all over the world.

The company produces shoes for people of all ages, but will initially concentrate on its babies’ and children’s collections in trying out Fragrant Leather. At the forthcoming Pitti Bimbo (Florence, January 18–20) and Magic Kids (Las Vegas, February 12–15) exhibitions, Atlanta will have the first Fragrant Leather moccasins on display. It will initially incorporate the chocolate, lemon, strawberry and orange options into its lines, but more could follow if buyers like what they see and sniff.

Back at Nova Empresa, work is ongoing to come up with new fragrances and matching colours. The tanner also wants to see if the idea will work on other types of leather, for example full-grain aniline. It’s all part of what Dr Sousa calls the company’s attempts to bring innovation to a material that people have been using to make clothes, footwear and other products for millennia. 🌐