

The Green Evolution of Trend Forecasting

In a market that experiences rapid and constant change, capturing trends has become vital for interior designers and manufacturers to stay competitive.

These days, the market is moving to a more ethical place driven by sustainability, where recycling, upcycling and repurposed products are at the forefront of design and purchases.

In 2012, renowned French product designer Phillippe Starck told *Frame Magazine* that the new trend was leaning toward a growing responsibility people have to the long-term survival of the environment and humanity stating, “forget furniture, let’s use our fantastic creativity to save life.”

In a world where trend cycles are diminishing, the environment is a priority and designers are focusing on customisation, is there still room for trend forecasting?



Genty Marshall, director of Australia’s New Black Global Trends, believes trend forecasters will remain key to battling climate change and will continue directing and educating the industry on their environmental options.

“The role of the forecaster is to inform their client base, be it the public, manufacturers or designers, about the drivers that influence their products and services,” she explains.

“One of these drivers is climate change. Whether that’s in energy pricing, ethics, economic or environmental sustainability, these drivers will have impact on the design, branding, marketing, materials and construction. Informing the industry on how to use design to respond to these threats and opportunities is increasingly part of the trend forecaster’s responsibility.”



Milou Ket, Creative Director. Image: Decoration & Design

In the Netherlands, Milou Ket, director of Milou Ket styling and design draws on her own observations when it comes to trend forecasting.

“As a trend watcher I just observe what is going on in society and what occupies the consumer. When those topics are important in society, they are important to the trend forecasting industry,” she says.

Ket conducts extensive research and has been inspired by activist Gunter Pauli and his book *The Blue Economy*.

Pauli recently spoke at a well-attended session at Green Cities in Sydney earlier this year and challenged audience members on their environmental contribution, telling industry members that sustainability initiatives will be delivered when they “respond to the basic needs of everyone on earth with what we have.”

Ket reflected Pauli’s notion that simple, low-tech solutions can often be the most effective.

“I have encouraged my customers to consume less, to be conscious of what they buy. We all have to accept the consequence that our world is changing, but we don’t have a choice, but to change our behaviour,” she says.

While trend forecasters have traditionally advised buyers and designers on new directions, both Ket and Marshall are now delivering directive information to a more environmentally responsible market.

“Now the consumer is more interested in recycling and upcycling, and combining old and new,” explains Ket.

“So I have to pay attention to what consumers will buy new, and in what way they combine those products with existing ones. People have discovered the pleasure of repairing, to spend less and sometimes to avoid spending money all together.”

Marshall who has seen a natural evolution of her role, notes that the principles remain largely the same

“When you’re bringing a new product to market you need to understand the values, desires and trends for the audience you’re wishing to capture, regardless of your materials and processes. The main challenge that many forecasters face is staying informed in such a rapidly changing environment,” she says.



Milou Ket Colour Mix. Image: Modeinfo

“With the movement towards smaller run manufacturing, the constantly evolving standards and certifications throughout the supply chain and increasingly rapid innovation in materials and technology, it is essential that forecasters maintain an increasingly diverse, international network of professionals to ensure that their services are valuable and advice is timely and accurate.”

In terms of clientele, Marshall has also observed a diversification in services required.

“While some companies continue to seek fairly traditional product development and consumer information services, others are now broadening their requirements to include significant research into end-user experience to inform the design process from the concept stage onwards,” she explains.

While some forecasters are predicting the end of trend cycles, both Ket and Marshall remain confident in their industry’s survival.

“When people are consuming less, it has of course influence on the trend forecasting industry,” explains Ket. “It is slowing down and it may decrease but on the other hand I still feel responsible to help people make good design choices.

Ket has always felt a responsibility from the beginning of her long term career to encourage good, conscious buying and production.

“I feel I can lead the way. I have been in this field for such a long time, and a time where there was even less prosperity and there was not a ridiculous boom in spending,” she says.



New Black Global Trends – Trend Resources. Image: New Black Global Trends

”Beauty and the joy it brings, is and remains my motivation for this profession.”

Marshall also believes that even as the industry becomes environmentally conscious and a little more humble with product and material choice, there is an incredible demand for credible trend sources.

“We’ve seen a huge growth in both amateur and professional trend ‘spotters’, be it bloggers, reporters or stylists, who edit what is predominantly new release, retail, fashion-oriented product into consumer-focused styling and colour directions for the current and upcoming seasons,” she explains.

“In response to this flooding of the market and confusion of titles and practices, many established Trend Forecasters are now adopting the title of Futurist to distinguish their services and expertise.”

In terms of trend forecasting surviving a reuse-focused economy, Marshall noted that her industry will be able to adapt.

“I feel that every single profession is likely to change dramatically over the next 20 years in response to environmental change and many of us could find ourselves in roles that don’t even exist yet,” says Marshall.

By Angela Fedele

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