

TITLE

EARTH as a contemporary design object

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ABSTRACT

Unfired earth materials present an opportunity for sustainable architecture on different levels. From an environmental point of view, earth has a triple benefit in the life cycle; the resource being abundantly available, the low need of energy to process the material and the potential for harmless disposal at the end of life. Additionally, in order to create a successful sustainable design, the material needs to be appreciated by its users, whether it is used for a building, building component or an object.

This research aims to put forward ways of using earth in a contemporary way through the method of Material Driven Design. The aim is to propose unfired earth material applied in a way that is attractive to the user and, meanwhile, taking into account environmental aspects. Exploratory interviews and a survey with a public of laymen and architect/designers were done to analyse the way they experience (unfired) earth. This input was used during the designing and building of an earth object; a combined phone vault and bedside lamp.

Rather than designing a building or building part, an object allows to go more profound into refining the shape, texture, production process and finishing method. Meanwhile, the deliberate choice of making a daily object, allows to introduce a more general public in order to provoke discussion on the material experience of earth. This way the object design can potentially function as a catalyst, between raw material and full-scale construction.

This paper gives an overview on the former steps (interviews, survey) and following reflections on potential tracks of using earth when applied in a contemporary western European context. The research for design phase guided the design process towards a specific shape and materiality. The process of materialisation is briefly presented, from material tinkering to a very defined production process. Lastly, a further example on how to apply a similar research and design process in future earth designs or applications on an architectural scale will be presented.