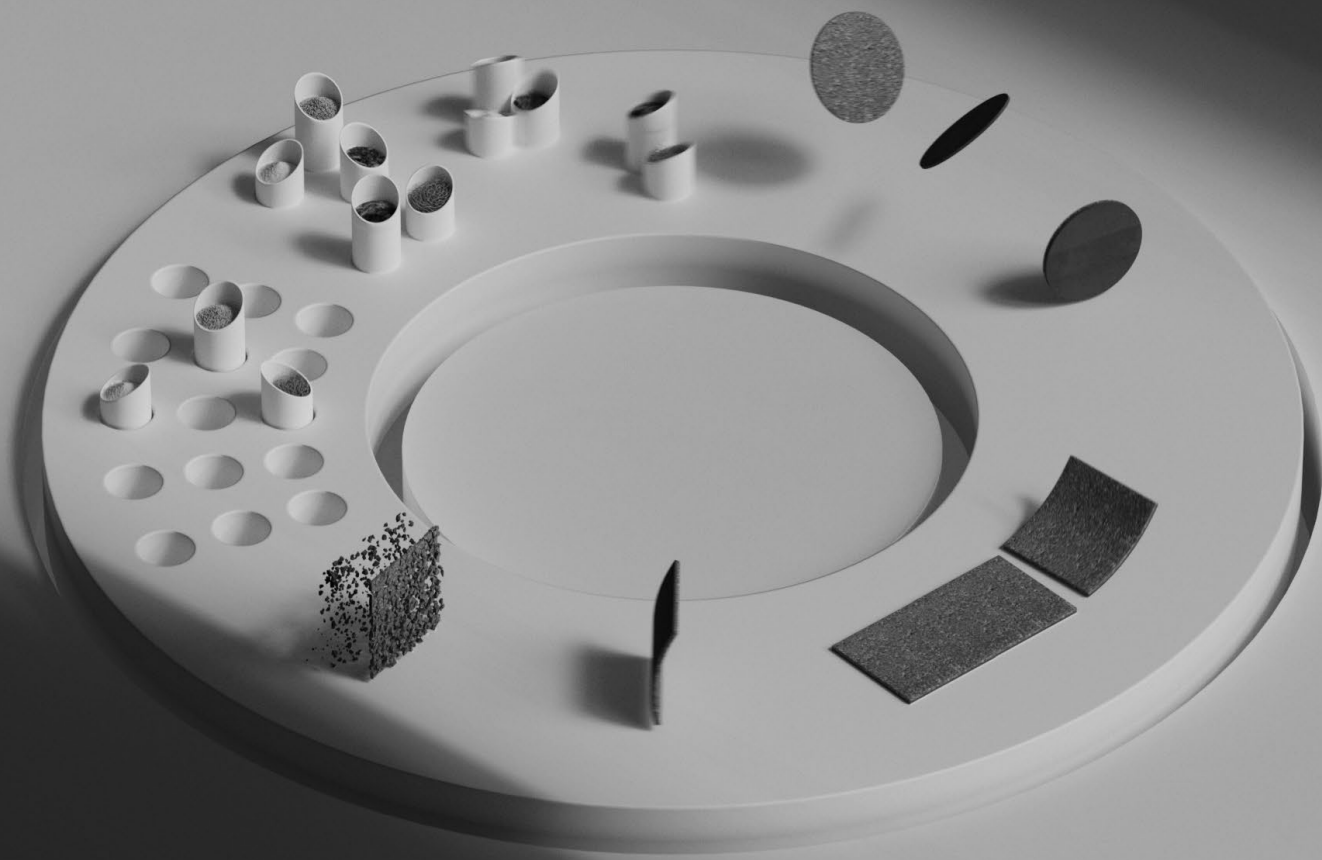


Inspire Circular Programme

EVENT 1 REPORT

The Economic Case for Circularity
in Architecture and Design

“Circularity is an environmental necessity. But it’s also an opportunity for our industry to innovate, create value and build resilience. We hope you will join us on this incredible journey of transformation.”



Thomas Leneveu, Vice President Commercial Business Unit, Tarkett EMEA

EVENT 1

Foreword

A decade ago, we decided to place circularity at the core of our ambitions as a business. We wanted to move away from the building industry’s standard take-make-waste model, towards a closed-loop system where our products and materials could live multiple lives. We call our commitment in EMEA the Beauty of Circularity.

During our circular transformation, we’ve come to realise that collaboration within and across industries is the best way for circularity to reach the size and scale needed. We urgently need to embrace a new era of transparency and collective action if we are to make progress towards a better future.

It’s with this spirit of collaboration that we have launched the Inspire Circular Programme. We want our events to become an indispensable source of inspiration and connection for our industry peers, deepening knowledge and looking for new ways to work together across industries.

Circularity is an environmental necessity. But it’s also an opportunity for our industry to innovate, create value and build resilience. We hope you will join us on this incredible journey of transformation.

Thomas Leneveu, Vice President Commercial Business Unit, Tarkett EMEA



As a longstanding partner of Tarkett, we’ve had the privilege of observing and being part of the business’s circular evolution for several years. What always strikes me is Tarkett’s unwavering belief that a sustainable, circular economy is entirely within our grasp, and that every single person can contribute to small shifts that will lead to much bigger changes in our economic system. None more so than architects, designers and others working within the built environment.

The Inspire Circular Programme is a manifestation of this belief. It’s a space for collaboration, possibility and action. No one is pretending the transition will be easy. But by coming together as an industry and pushing for urgent progress together, we will prove that it can – and must – be achieved.

Caroline Till, Executive Director, FranklinTill



EVENT 1



EVENT 1: The Economic Case for Circularity in Architecture and Design

Tarkett’s Inspire Circular Programme aims to inspire, inform and empower those working within architecture, design and the built environment. Connecting three key areas of knowledge and opportunity – design, materials and systems – the programme will bring together a wide range of experts to share their experience and insights, including architects, designers, engineers, academics, economists and business leaders.

The focus of Inspire Circular is on sharing, learning and opening up – because it’s only by collaborating and inspiring each other that we will create the momentum and scale needed to move from an extractive take-make-waste model to a circular economy that keeps materials in the loop, and rewards everyone for taking part.

This report sets out some of the key insights and learnings shared during the inaugural Inspire Circular event, which took place at Tarkett’s London Atelier in April 2025. Further events are planned across Europe during 2025, and Tarkett will continue to share highlights and points of inspiration from these gatherings.

“WE NEED TO RECLAIM THE NARRATIVE”: COMMITTING TO THE CIRCULAR TRANSITION

Tarkett’s inaugural Inspire Circular event set out to explore the economic case for circularity in the built environment. Countering the assumption that circular systems are unfeasible and unaffordable, speakers drew on evidence that circular systems are, in fact, economically possible, innovative and exciting, opening up new opportunities and creating competitive advantage.

Equipped with case studies and practical insights, speakers showed that the transition to a circular economy is now firmly

within reach – and in some cases already well underway – even against a geopolitical backdrop of climate action backlash and greenhushing.

Circularity is an adaptation challenge, said keynote speaker Ioannis Ioannou, Associate Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at London Business School. Part of that challenge is adapting our mindset. We are constantly told that sustainability and circularity are not possible, but we can reclaim the narrative by including everyone in our vision of what we can gain, and showing clearly how we can get there. “This is about building healthier lives, more high-quality jobs, innovation and sustainable growth, a system that works better for everybody within planetary boundaries,” Ioannou said. Each of us has the agency to help make that happen.

THE BEST BUSINESSES ARE ADAPTING NOW

The transition will happen, Ioannou said, because the environmental, social and moral costs of extractive business models will increasingly be priced in for companies to pay. We have a choice as to whether this transition will be orderly or disorderly, and businesses that have already made this choice, and started reinvesting and adjusting their supply chains to move to circularity, will reap the benefits. “If you adjust you will be a more profitable business, but adjusting is about genuine change,” he said.

Pointing to Blockbuster Video as a warning of what happens to businesses that don’t anticipate change and act accordingly, Ioannou said: “We need big companies to transition because they have a lot of clout, but there are many instances where breakthrough innovations come from new entrants.”



IMAGE: Amy Frearson, journalist and editor, in conversation with Ioannis Ioannou, Associate Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at London Business School, at Tarkett’s Inspire Circular event in London.



“People often ask whether the transition to a circular economy is going to happen or not. This is the wrong question – the transition is going to happen anyway, but is it going to be orderly or disorderly? Will we build the infrastructure that is needed to make the change? Or will Mother Nature do it for us?”

Ioannis Ioannou, Associate Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, London Business School

Circularity is an Innovation Driver

Ultimately, Ioannou said, the economic system that we live within is man-made, and we all have the agency – collectively and individually – to define it from within. Pushing back against the myth that sustainable products are always more expensive, he insisted that “if you use circularity as a lever for innovation in order to ultimately produce better, more functional, more beautiful products, you can price them the right way.”

Speakers presented data, research and case studies that bolstered this argument. “The built environment is the biggest opportunity to change the take-make-waste system we have and decouple economic opportunity from resources,” said Sarah Dodge, Strategic Design Manager at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. The foundation’s 2024 report, [Building Prosperity: Unlocking the potential of a nature-positive, circular economy for Europe](#), shows that €575bn in revenue across the built environment value chain could be realised annually over the next 10 years.

One case study in the Unlocking Value in Buildings report, of the Rabobank circular fit-out refurbishment by Arup, charts the cost over time of the circular fit-out as compared to a business-as-usual fit-out, showing that the cost was lower for the circular pathway from the beginning. The difference in cost over time only widened, making the cumulative cost of the circular fit-out about half that of the business-as-usual route.

Kai Liebetanz, former Head of Nature and Resource Use at UK Green Building Council, cited the Council’s evaluation of [18 case studies of built projects, looking at the effects of circular economy principles on carbon and cost](#). “The carbon always goes down if you use circular economy principles but the costs can go up or down,” he explained. “There’s a perceived cost but it’s not necessarily a real cost.”

Where costs have been lower in circular projects, it’s often due to using smart, flexible design approaches such as modular systems, ‘severed’ technical elements and salvageable materials that can be resold at end-of-use – showing how powerful design is in embedding circularity.



KEY THEMES

Six clear approaches to drive change emerged over the course of Inspire Circular’s inaugural event, each equipping designers, architects and all stakeholders with the mindset, inspiration and motivation to commit to change and embed circularity.

CREATE DEMAND: architects and designers have the power to drive market demand by showing how low-carbon buildings can be aspirational, beautiful and innovative, and by advocating for circular systems at every opportunity

SEEK OUT COLLABORATORS AND CO-OPETITION: collaboration is essential to drive progress in circularity, while co-opetition – where competitors collaborate or use competitive pressure to drive action and open up opportunities – can galvanise entire industries to transition more quickly

REUSE AND RECYCLING: while not a guarantee for circularity, innovative economic levers are being developed to make reuse the easier and more attractive option for suppliers, specifiers, architects and structural engineers, including business models that focus on resale opportunities

WORK LOCALLY AND BIOREGIONALLY: by understanding local capabilities, materials and appetite for change, designers and architects can sensitively co-design with communities, making retrofit, refurbishment and circular systems more feasible

CONNECT DECONSTRUCTION WITH RECONSTRUCTION: designing for deconstruction and embedding systems to capture and reprocess materials is a growing focus, and will spur innovation across infrastructure

DON’T USE COMPLEXITY AS AN EXCUSE: change-makers should develop clear and understandable metrics to measure progress, build knowledge and curiosity, to build confidence and focus on action

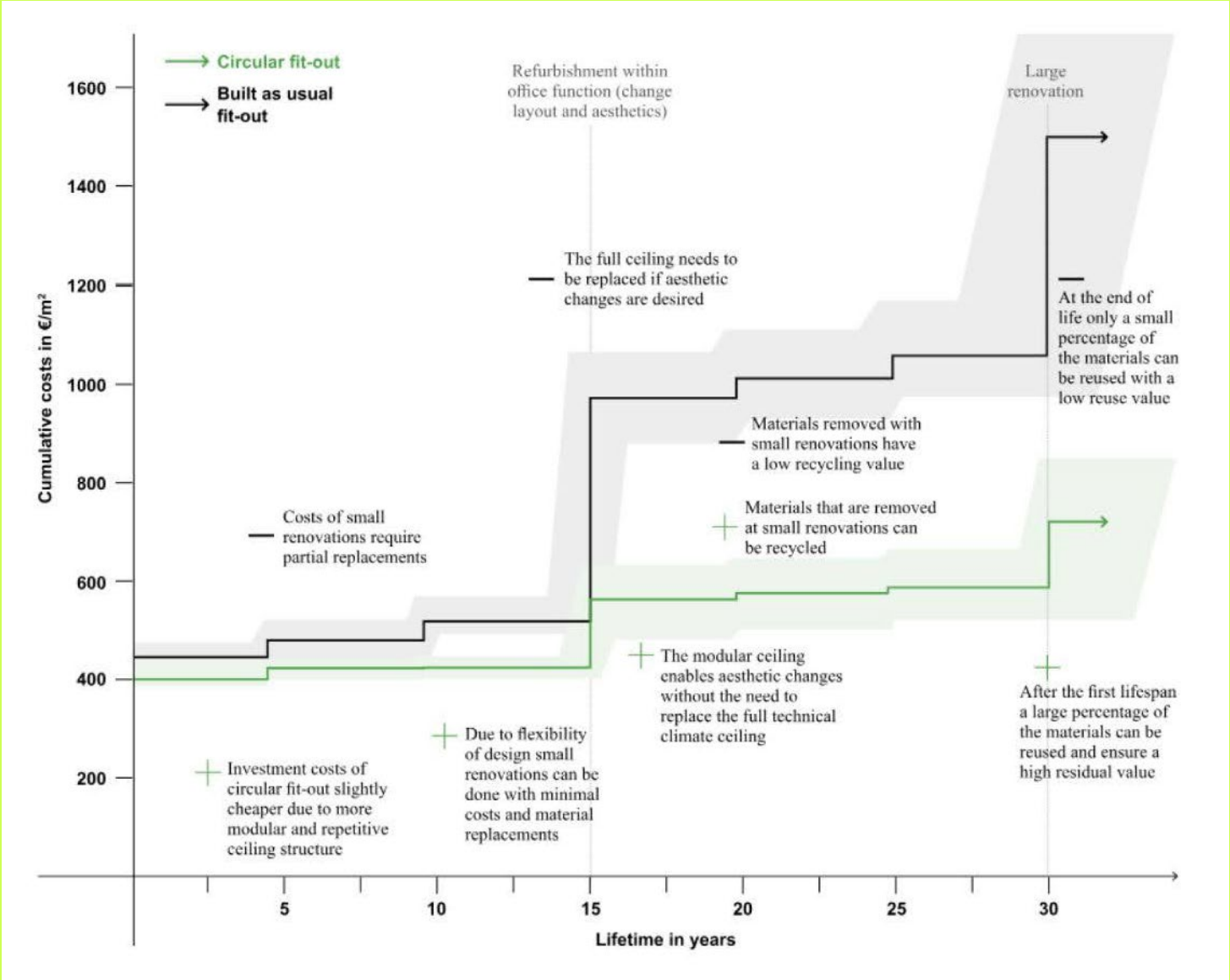


IMAGE: In its 2025 report *Unlocking Value in Buildings*, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and Arup explore the benefits of a circular fit-out at the Rabobank building in Utrecht, the Netherlands, compared to a business-as-usual fit-out. The graph above demonstrates a lower financial cost for the circular fit-out pathway from the outset.



Create Demand

Architects, designers and consumers all have important roles to play in driving market demand, speakers explained, and shouldn't underestimate the power they have to advocate for circular systems.

"It's about engaging with the community, with who you work with and your colleagues to drive the movement," said Marianne Löwgren, Business Development Manager at Atelier Ten. "Drip-feeding is the way to make it the status quo."

Persistence and continued focus can make the difference. "Bring the circular economy up at every design meeting, at every opportunity, and that creates shared learning in the industry and also drives demand," said Kai Liebetanz formerly of the UK Green Building Council.

One of the ways to shape a more compelling narrative for circularity is to emphasise the experiential and aesthetic benefits of circular design. "There are ways that you can describe aspirations," said Cíaran Malik, Senior Lecturer in Structures and Materials for the Architectural Association and Kingston School of Art. "If you haven't spent the night in a passive house, it's so cosy and so lovely."

"We need to get better at communicating the beauty of a different kind of architecture, that incorporates reused materials and adds history to buildings," said Liebetanz. "I'm a big fan of the New European Bauhaus, where the EU has tried to revive the spirit of Bauhaus from a sustainability perspective. There's huge funding available to create buildings that are functional, sustainable and beautiful."



IMAGE ABOVE AND RIGHT: Architecture practice Studio Saar worked with Roots Natural Food Movement to help develop Higher Farm in Castle Cary into a space for agroecology and natural food farming ventures. The starting point for the project was a material audit of the entire site, to identify and catalogue all building materials that could be reused on-site or off-site, reclaimed or recycled.

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Kai Liebetanz, Former Head of Nature and Resource Use, UK Green Building Council



Seek Out Collaborators and Co-opetition

“For Tarkett, cross-industry partnerships are absolutely crucial to circularity. We have learned across the years that you cannot do circularity alone. You really need to be able to open yourself up for those types of collaborations across different industries.”

Anette Timmer, Marketing & Communication Director Commercial Flooring, for Tarkett EMEA

IMAGE: Waste chalk from the Dutch water industry is now upcycled into stabiliser for DESSO's EcoBase carpet backing. DESSO previously relied on virgin chalk sourced from a mine in Northern France.

Circularity is an inherently collaborative process, and every speaker had a story of collaboration, whether within design teams, in partnership with a community, in relationships between suppliers, specifiers and architects, or between companies.

For Tarkett, collaboration has been essential to its progress in circularity. “The only way to move the needle and turn circularity into a real business opportunity for us all is to open up, be vulnerable and share challenges across the board, because that’s how we find these unexpected solutions – together,” said Anette Timmer, Marketing & Communication Director Commercial Flooring for Tarkett EMEA.

A previous Tarkett initiative, Cradle-to-Cradle Cafes, brought cross-industry professionals together for this purpose and led directly to circular innovation. At one event, the director of a local drinking-water company was able to propose a solution to one of Tarkett’s challenges – replacing the calcium carbonate

in its backing tiles with a recycled source– by offering up the calcium carbonate his company produced as a waste stream. Their partnership continues to this day.

Successful projects require every stakeholder to sign up to the same vision, adapt their ways of working and communicate effectively, Kai Liebetanz explained. “You need to allow longer timelines and be flexible.”

Sarah Dodge of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation described the idea of co-opetition, which sees competitors collaborating to create mutual value, tackling shared challenges or pushing each other further by way of competitive pressure.

In the flooring industry, Timmer of Tarkett noted, “There’s a lot of push for sustainability, which is good because it breeds healthy competition. I hope from an industry point of view that we create difference on a broader scale.”



Reuse and Recycling

Businesses that choose to flip their perception and think of their waste as assets suddenly have a raft of opportunities opened up to them, speakers explained.

Cíaran Malik of the Architectural Association said that we should see reuse as the default approach: “Suppliers are taking back materials and selling them on; that is excellent and should be the standard.” Reuse should be the first option before recycling, he pointed out. Instead of melting steel down to make new beams, existing beams could be certified and warrantied for reuse. “We need to be more creative,” he said. “I don’t think everyone is seeing the circular economy as the first shelf to go to.”

Business models can be subtly redesigned to change this. Tarkett’s new iQ Loop range of homogeneous vinyl acts as an incentive to encourage buyers to help to close the loop. The product is made with at least 65% recycled content and clients can only purchase it if they also contribute material to be recycled.

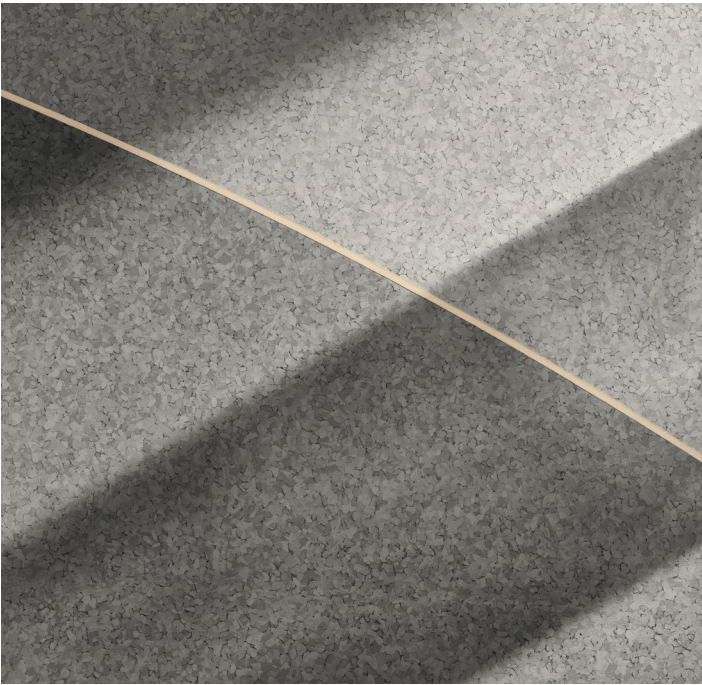


IMAGE: Tarkett’s iQ Loop homogeneous vinyl

IMAGE: Tarkett’s ReStart take-back and recycling scheme has played a vital role in its transition to a closed-loop system, ensuring more post-installation and used flooring avoids landfill and incineration in up to 22 countries across EMEA.



Work Locally and Bioregionally



IMAGE: Architecture practice Studio Saar produced the Craft Not Carbon pavilion in London’s Crystal Palace Park for the 2023 London Festival of Architecture. The structure uses a woven bamboo canopy made by local craftspeople, that can be repaired by local weavers after storms.

Speakers advocated for a localised approach, bringing design teams closer to production and considering locale more deeply in material and design specification.

One of the benefits is that the knowledge this builds for designers and architects – of available materials, available skillsets and local priorities and needs – can make the feasibility of lower-impact approaches such as retrofit and refurbishment much stronger.

By working in collaboration with local communities, makers and producers, designers can respond to the uniqueness of place and unlock potential, said Jonny Buckland, Architectural Designer and Co-Founder of Studio Saar, which is based in the UK and India. “If you can bring people from the beginning of a project all the way through and talk about circularity, there’s a deeper knowledge and understanding of how it goes together, and the process that got you there.”

EVENT 1

IMAGE: Studio Saar’s Cowshed project in Rajasthan, India, uses a hybrid of modern and traditional practices, including the innovative repurposing of materials from a recently demolished building on site. Studio Saar expanded the brief to provide recycled waste from the farming process to produce power, making the farm’s ongoing agricultural operations net-zero.



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Jonny Buckland, Co-Founder and Creative Director, Studio Saar

“You’ve got to think about end of life at the beginning, about how materials can be put into closed-loop cycles, and how to get your product back so you can remake with it.”

Caroline Till, Executive Director, FranklinTill



Connect Deconstruction with Reconstruction

Designing for circularity means starting at the end. “You’ve got to think about end of life at the beginning, about how materials can be put into closed-loop cycles, and how to get your product back so you can remake with it,” said Caroline Till, Executive Director of FranklinTill.

For the Third Space cultural centre built in Udaipur, Studio Saar avoided using concrete by using load-bearing stones from local quarries, which can be dismantled and recycled later on. Design for disassembly also directly informed a project for a pavilion in India that can be separated into many small elements, packed away and re-erected for other events. It has already been reused in three more locations.

Design for disassembly is the first step, but as Anette Timmer of Tarkett pointed out, “Reuse is not a guarantee for circularity – only if you have the system in place to make sure it happens.”

Marianne Löwgren of Atelier Ten advocated for using certification frameworks and statements of guidance as toolkits in early project meetings, to align design team and client on a mission. Another tip: repackage the pre-demolition audit, which catalogues the materials available in all the buildings that need to be demolished with a statement of condition on material quantity and reusability, and push that to the design team to work with those materials wherever possible. “Once agreed with the client, we make this form part of the tender package with the demolition contractor,” she said.

To make closed-loop systems as effective and scalable as possible, new infrastructure and organisations will need to be developed – as well as job roles. “Deconstruction worker



IMAGE LEFT AND ABOVE: Studio Saar’s Third Space in Udaipur, India, focused on using local materials. The masonry walls were formed by waste marble rubble and lime mortar from nearby mines, while marble dust, a waste product from the marble mining and processing industry, was used in the concrete as a cement replacement.

will be a job soon,” said Sarah Dodge of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, who is tracking innovative approaches to connecting the deconstruction to the designers of the next building. “NYC has a few case studies where they’re actively deconstructing a couple of buildings while designing the new buildings.”

Don't Use Complexity as an Excuse

“There are a lot of calls for more data, more information, complicated metrics,” said Kai Liebetanz, pointing out that clear and understandable metrics are not only more accessible and more motivating, they’re also harder to game.

Focus on input and output, he said. “Look at materials coming in and coming out, what’s the circularity potential and what’s had a previous life.” The end goal should be a material footprint that’s as close to zero as possible, minimising new-version material and minimising waste. “I’d urge everyone to prioritise action over data.”

Build your own curiosity and knowledge to grow your confidence in specification, advised Cíaran Malik of the Architectural Association. “Get a set of materials you are curious about and constantly trying to pitch. You get knocked down the first time but you come back, get better at answering questions and remove the fear from those conversations.”

He also had a more esoteric piece of advice: taste your materials. “Circular economy materials are typically more natural: once you strip out chemicals, they should in theory be edible.”



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Cíaran Malik, Senior Lecturer in Structures and Materials for the Architectural Association and Kingston School of Art

Ultimately the message for us all was to take the baton and remember that we can each drive change, and often more quickly than we might think. As Thomas Leneveu, Vice President Commercial Business Unit at Tarkett EMEA, said in his closing remarks: “We tend to over-complexify and hide what we already can do by saying we cannot do it, or only setting metrics for 10 years’ time, when we know what we can do next week or next month.”

The circular transition is underway in design, architecture and the built environment, but it needs to ramp up quickly. Each of us has the power to push for change, and to make the case for circularity in economic, ecological and social terms. As the climate emergency continues, the need to be radical and tell a more inspiring story of what’s possible is growing – but we also have more tools, strategies and collaborators available than ever before. If we commit to being vulnerable, open up and pool our knowledge and experience, we can accelerate the transition and create a raft of new value, including better buildings, new job roles, and a closed loop in which everyone benefits.

The overall message from Inspire Circular’s inaugural event was that the time to change is now, and we’re fully equipped to do so – together.



Tarkett's Inspire Circular Programme is built on knowledge-sharing and collaboration. If you're interested in collaborating or would like to have a conversation about any of the themes covered in this report, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact [\[add email\]](#)

For news of future Inspire Circular events taking place across Europe during 2025, please sign up to Tarkett's newsletter [\[add link\]](#).