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FEATHERWORK

Artist Simon Costin's latest pieces are featherworks – large-scaled circles of layered goose, pheasant and duck feathers that recall the feather textiles of Pre-Columbian America. Some are left in natural colours (as above), others dyed in gaudy primaries that not even a jungle cocatoo would dare to sport, creating a sort of hypnotic power through the scale and simplicity of form. Costin, whose previous works have included a sperm necklace – a string of phials containing sperm that now hangs in the V&A collection – aims to question modern man's lack of empathy with nature. His latest work will be on show at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery at St James's, 197 Piccadilly, corner Church Place, W1, tel 071-434 4401, until March 12th

these stores, but Terra Verde is keen to emphasise its difference. It is not motivated by aesthetics, but by a way of life. 'We want our customer to buy less – less packaging, fewer throwaway items and non-repairable appliances,' trumpets the company literature. 'We have put together a collection of merchandise that is beautiful and durable, made in an ecological way rather than covered with environmental messages.'

And they have a point. To many the new pretender, the Felissimo store, suffers from a pretentious tokenism: they re-wrap their plastic-covered sheets in earth-friendly linen fastened with a birch toggle – though it's *not* cut from a living tree, but a piece of fallen

wood, as the studiously-correct assistants will tell you.

Friedman admits the store is not 100 per cent eco-friendly. 'For this kind of mid-town location, that sort of merchandise simply doesn't exist.' At least not yet. But Fazio and Friedman exert a benevolent pressure on their designers to use more earth-friendly materials, with results that include such treasures as Bob Reid's Monde clocks, made out of wooden mulch and painted with non-toxic milk-based paints and Mon Jardin's soaps made of natural essential oils, and packaged in recycled metals and reclaimed woods.

Of course, a few pleasing sonnets and a lot of brightly coloured gift wrap won't save the planet. But Felissimo's

breadth of product, its vivid imagination and holistic approach are signs that environmental awareness isn't losing its footing, but moving into a second generation of experimentation with new mediums and forms. Indeed, the eclectic cutting-edge designs that fill the store seem the natural successors to the messianic uniformity and spartan produce at Manhattan's first ecological department store.

Changing attitudes to ecology are slowly making progress here, too. The arrival of Japanese store Muji made utilitarian basics fashionable. The Muji line is to reduce unnecessary waste by keeping design as simple as possible, and packaging minimal. Another newcomer

is Shabby Chic (tel 071-352 6931), who make large and squashy sofas using traditional methods and eco-friendly materials. There is also the Green Catalogue, set up 18 months ago. Their household range includes unbleached cotton sheets (from £16.95). Call (0934) 732469 for details.

Many furniture designers are vigilant about working with wood from sustained forests, recycled materials and natural processes. However, while most trends eventually wash up here from across the Atlantic, this one needs the support of retailers and consumers to make it more than a fad. □

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