

Inspired by nature

An appeal by Helen Turnbull of the Cape Leopard Trust.

This being To Build's Green Edition, it is only appropriate that we recommend a worthy environmental cause to designers and property developers alike. Have you ever considered the animal behind one of design's most famous fabric patterns? Helen Turnbull, acting CEO of the Cape Leopard Trust, argues the case for the design community supporting the cause of the Cape Mountain Leopard.

Did you know that leopards still live wild and free in our mountains? Extremely elusive and, like most other local wildlife, they have adapted their lifestyle to fit in with our increasing hunger for human habitation opportunity, even as it pushes ever deeper into their rapidly declining home ranges. On the whole, wildlife prefers to maintain a safe distance between us and them – though baboons are occasionally the exception to the rule.

We are extremely privileged to have healthy eco systems around us in South Africa, especially in the Cape. It is something we often take for granted, and



Cape Mountain Leopard caught on camera trap

Pic credit: Cape Leopard Trust



Leopard print fashion by Gavin Rajah - modelled by Grade 12 Learners from Reddam College.

Pic credit: Gareth Griffiths Imaging



Climbing Leopard rug by Diane Von Furstenberg in hand knotted silk

Photo credit: Lauren Shantall



fortunately there seems to be a growing appreciation of the intrinsic value of our natural capital. The positive spin off of this is that we are seeing building trends developing that are more inclined to create structures that complement and work with the environment. This is reflected in both the residential and commercial building sector. The new FNB flagship building at the Foreshore generated

substantial interest at its recent launch, and Hotel Verde at Cape Town International Airport has just been voted Africa's greenest hotel.

Nature forms the basis of our colour palette and creative spectrum, and its influence is integral to design plans. The importance of its role has perhaps not been properly recognised up to now, but given the finite resources around us, architects and builders are forced to acknowledge things they may not have felt important before – for example, heat management, roof angles to facilitate optimal water run off for rain water catchment tanks, or building position to maximise light that will support solar power generation. This is a positive development that may, in future, prevent planning permission being granted for unsightly structures are entirely out of sync with their surrounds.

Leopard skin print of all varieties maintains its classic popularity in décor, and it would be nice to think that those who incorporate it into their designs give some thought to the subject of their inspiration. The leopard is truly breath taking – sleek, purposeful and majestic – the only animal remaining of the

legendary 'big 5' still roaming wild in some of our rural areas. As the apex predator, leopards have a direct influence on managing the natural balance, and ultimately they are the gatekeepers of our biodiversity. A truly 'designer' animal.

Fortunately for the leopard there is a committed and dedicated organisation watching its back. The Cape Leopard Trust was established in 2004 as an active wildlife research group and has established leopard conservation projects in the Cederberg, Boland, Namaqua National Park and, more recently, the Table Mountain National Park. That said, leopards are long gone from Table Mountain and the head honcho in residence now is the caracal (Rooikat). †

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Globally, leopards are classified by the IUCN as 'near threatened'

There is a speculative estimate that around 500 wild leopards are left in the Cape. Leopards globally are classified as 'near threatened' by the IUCN, and research to secure their place in the natural environment is much needed. The Cape Leopard Trust uses the leopard as an icon to promote environmental awareness, which in turn should motivate conservation action. But the clock is ticking. If we are to ensure their survival and ours, even in the discipline of building and design, we should be finding ways to connect dynamically with our environment and measure our impacts more effectively. If these apex predators and the biodiversity upon which they depend is not adequately protected, however grand our plans and our buildings are, our world is but a house of cards.

How to get involved

- Support the Cape Leopard Trust – give back to the cause of these 'designer' cats.
- Become a project sponsor/corporate sponsorship
- 'Adopt a spot' – The Adopt-A-Spot Programme allows you 'time-share' one of the leopards under the research of the Cape Leopard Trust for a period of one year. You will receive a digital gift certificate and the Cape Leopard Trust will send you photographs and news on our leopards on a quarterly basis. Your name will also appear on the website as a spot sponsor for the year of your sponsorship.
- Private donors and bequests
- Camera trap sponsors – The data received from sponsored camera traps helps researchers to better understand the ecology of leopards in project areas. A camera trap costs R3 600 per annum to sponsor and is used to gather further data in one of the study sites. The Trust acknowledges each camera sponsorship by placing the sponsors name on the unit and on the website for the year.
- Online shop – As part of its marketing and fundraising strategies, the Cape Leopard Trust offers a range of merchandise that promotes the project and increases the presence of the organisation. By buying an item, the purchaser can play a pivotal role in helping the organisation to raise much needed funds to drive conservation efforts, as well as promoting the marketing of the Cape Leopard Trust.
- Designers can support the cause by mentioning the cause when they launch their new designs.
- Join in the fun side. For those in the Cape, the Trust is holding a high-profile fundraiser luncheon at Leopards Leap Family Vineyards on Saturday, 15 August. Ticket sales will launch shortly.