



## The Future: A Perfect Fit

by Nina Rothschild Utne

As a college freshman, Tom Szaky decided to package worm poop in recycled soda bottles and sell it as plant fertilizer. Just a few years after he dropped out of Princeton to pursue his dream, it's available at Target, Home Depot, Wal-Mart, and other retailers. He's gone on to develop an array of products made out of what we throw away (Christmas stockings fashioned from old clothes, ornaments cut from discarded CDs, even a dress designed entirely out of used fruit drink pouches). For every other species on the planet, waste is a resource, a part of life's cycle. Szaky's work helps align humans with the rest of creation.

Laurie Brown, ahead of her time 17 years ago when she opened the nation's second all-green store in Minneapolis, is right on time with the patents she currently holds for a machine that reads bar codes on bottles, then automatically refills them. If the device catches on, it could significantly reduce the amount of plastic in our landfills and save energy that's typically used to ship water-based products, such as household cleansers and personal care products, around the globe.

Macalester College student Timothy DenHerder-Thomas has assembled a national network of advisers to invent a process to help homeowners bid out energy improvements together, as if collectively they were a business. This will help keep costs down and, thanks to the cooperative model they will use to finance the program, investors will be paid out of the energy savings.

What these three share, in addition to passion, a deep sense of purpose, and having me as an active fan (I'm an investor in Laurie's company and serve on Timothy's steering committee), is that I also consider them pioneers of *Futurefit*.™

*Futurefit* is an expression I plucked out of the ether after exploring how to be more responsible for the eco-footprint of my largish, leaky house. *Retrofit*, the term du jour in many makeover conversations, has the sound and feel of a Band-Aid fix for a systemic failure. So, in the spirit of committing to real change, I decided to trademark *Futurefit*.

Not long after coming up with the idea, I took a trip to Ecuador with my 22-year-old son Oliver. We spent time deep in the jungle with Achuar guides and naturalist translators, observing the elegant and complex interactions of species. High in the Andes, we talked about the rewriting of the Ecuadorian constitution, which many hope will be drafted to protect the rights of nature and of indigenous peoples, as well as guard against the ravages of corporate favoritism.

We met with shamans and had experiences that reminded us that what we Northerners call reality is a very thin slice of the web that connects us to all life. And we registered more viscerally the fact that our consumerist trance is poisoning all life.

The trip, and especially my conversations with Oliver, further convinced me that to *Futurefit* is to reframe many of our most pressing issues, from how to reuse our waste to rethinking a country's political system. It's

about how we manage not only our use of material resources, but also our personal energy, emotions, and social interactions.

The term itself is a playful twist of phrase meant to invite creativity, play, and a sense of possibility. It's also a nod toward the ingenuity inherent in designs like inventor Jay Harman's impeller, which was inspired by the movement of seaweed in storms. As Oliver, who is already planning a return to Ecuador after graduating from college, said recently: "*Futurefit* isn't just about the decisions we need to make for the seventh generation to come; it's seeing that those decisions are the same things we need to do now to really live life."

I'm mentally redesigning objects around me. What if the hot-air-driven fan on my woodstove were equipped with Harman's impeller? What products would qualify for a *Futurefit* store? What form would a *Futurefit* support group take? I'm also daydreaming about a radio show (think NPR's *Car Talk* as a tea party with revolving cohosts and visionary guests).

I find myself thinking about the late French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, often referred to as a pilgrim of the future, who said: "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

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