

Hermès' eco-revolutionary new handbags: How agricultural leftovers and mushrooms could fuel a switch to sustainable leather alternatives

MycoWorks certainly made headlines in the fashion world in March when it announced a collaboration with Hermès on the creation of Sylvania, a new premium, natural material grown from mycelium, the threadlike network of filaments in fungus. Using MycoWorks's patented Fine Mycelium technology, Sylvania will feature in Hermès's reimagined Victoria bag alongside calfskin and canvas elements when it debuts in late 2021.

This is a big deal. Hermès is a heritage brand built on exquisite leather craftsmanship. That it was willing to spend three years working with MycoWorks on an alternative suggests that the California-based start-up has epic, or at least poetic, potential. Indeed, so-called "mushroom leather", which should really be known as mycelium leather, is the current front-runner in the fashion industry's scramble to find a viable, ethical, non-plastic, low-carbon alternative to animal leather that is also biodegradable.

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"If you think of the triple-helix collagen structure of an animal hide, mycelium has a three-dimensional network structure that we're also working with that gives it its strength," explains [MycoWorks cofounder Sophia] Wang.

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