



# An old way back to whole

Recognising that antique brown is the new green may be one way of reconnecting with Mother Earth.

**R**ECENTLY MY HUSBAND AND I WERE LUCKY enough to get a table at an award-winning restaurant in a small country town about an hour's drive from Cape Town. It was the first time in three years that we had managed to get in, but it was worth the wait.

The food was fabulous. The asparagus was home-grown (from a vegetable garden that we could see outside the window), the lamb was local (from a farmer in the district), the chickens used to run wild on a plot skirting town (forget free range, these chickens were really free), the eggs came from a friend of the restaurateur and the cream was procured from a local cow. In fact, it seemed as if nothing was sourced from further than six kilometres from the village.

It also felt as if not a single opportunity was missed to relay this information to us, the expectant patrons. This "local is lekker" approach has become more than an orientation, it has become an integral part of the owner's branding. We lapped it up with the delicious sauce at the bottom of the plates that were made by the local potter.

Why do we fall for it? Because "local" suggests a contained wholesomeness for which we yearn. Our "village" has grown too big. Our ability to travel to any destination on Earth in give or take 24 hours, live satellite coverage of events tens of thousands of kilometres away, telephones and the internet all contribute to the illusion that the world is a village. But the world is not a village.

Why does this delusion matter? It matters because it creates a sense of helplessness and eventually a feeling of not being able to make any difference.

As a child our family spent our holidays on my grandparents' farm. Looking back I realise what a small "world" it was – area: 37 000 hectares; population: seven. Whatever needed doing had to be done by one of us. None of us would have hesitated to pick up a plastic bag rolling in the breeze. Yet today I would not imagine doing the same in the big town I live in. I feel it's someone else's responsibility.

The motto of this story? The smaller our "village", the bigger part we are willing to play in it. We take responsibility because we feel that it will make a difference. By thinking of the enormous world out there as our own little village, we have created a chasm too



PHOTOGRAPH: STRIJDOM VAN DER MERWE

An 18th-century Stinkwood chair against an old pepper tree in a forest near Stellenbosch. Stinkwoods are now protected trees, and the timber is no longer commercially available for furniture-making.

big to bridge – we have become disconnected from Earth, the body that sustains all life.

Mindfulness meditation offers us a glimpse into the blissful potential of a smaller reality. People who suffer from psychological disorders sometimes lose all sense of connectedness to their own bodies.

One technique in particular tries to redress the innate dis-ease of this disconnection. It is astonishingly easy to do. Wherever you are, just become quiet for a moment. If you feel like it, close your eyes and become aware of your body. Feel how your >>



>> skin touches your socks and the slight pressure against the inside of your shoes, become aware of the seam of your trousers or dress around your legs, the chair against your back, your arms pressing down, your fingers touching the magazine, your shoulders pulled up against gravity, feel the soft hair resting in your neck. Even call those wild galloping thoughts back to you for a moment. I always imagine that I suck myself from all over the place back into my own body, gently.

The only goal is to become conscious of your body. Once you feel your entire extremity, rest there for a while.

Did you try it? Was it good? That's what "whole" feels like. It is so easy, you just need a moment and awareness.

### Balancing energies

TALKING ABOUT AWARENESS, ARE YOU CARBON neutral?

Let me be the first to confess. Until I started research on this story, I had only a vague idea what a "carbon footprint" is and an even vaguer idea what my own could entail.

A carbon footprint is a measure that indicates the direct and indirect effect anything or anyone has on the environment during a defined period of time; it indicates the amount of greenhouse gases produced and is calculated in units of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).

Carbon footprints differ from country to country, industry to industry and person to person.

Even though our average total carbon footprint is lower than that of countries such as the United States (weighing in at a hefty 20 tons per person per year), South Africa nonetheless has one of the highest annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on the African continent (at between 9.3 and 12.81 tons per household per year).

There are hundreds of carbon counters on the internet, but the one I found most useful in calculating my own carbon footprint was <http://calculator.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>

Besides the country you live in, a whole plethora of factors influence the outcome: the type of home you have (is it an apartment or a free-standing home?), your lifestyle (whether your office and home are air-conditioned and how many appliances you use regularly), your inclination (whether you recycle) and your mode and frequency of transport.

In fact, every decision we make affects our carbon footprint: switching on a light, opening a tap, starting a car, taking a flight, running any kind of machinery, buying furniture.

Carbon dioxide emissions are the number-one contributor to global warming. Scientists fear that the world's overall temperature could rise by between 1.4°C and 5.8°C by the end of the century. The effect will be catastrophic.

Frightening thought, isn't it? Yet there is an even more frightening thought and this is it: that

we wouldn't try our best to stop (or even reverse) this situation.

Facts are always our friends, even if they frighten us or we don't agree with them or like them particularly much. And the fact is, we are responsible for global warming. The fact also is that we can do something about it (and here, dear reader, you would clearly see my irritating, half-full, optimistic side smiling at you).

We can do a lot or we can do a little. It doesn't matter, as long as we all do something. Reduce, re-use and recycle. Take a leaf from the fashionistas' book and buy local, drink tap water (producing bottled water uses almost 2 000 times more energy than tap water), switch to energy-saving bulbs, do the dishes by hand, choose conference-calling over international air travel, have a braai instead of the traditional oven roast, plant a tree. In fact, if you are seriously looking to offset your carbon footprint (that is when you do something else somewhere else to neutralise or balance out your own energy expenditure), plant a forest. And if you are really serious about becoming being carbon neutral, save a tree: buy antiques – they are green!

The Antiques are Green movement ([www.antiquesaregreen.org](http://www.antiquesaregreen.org)) emanated in England and was launched by a bright guy called Nigel Worboys in September 2009. It promotes the idea that antiques are "sustainable, re-usable and re-saleable". In other words, no deforestation, no manufacturing processes and no land-fill issues.

As part of the validation to this claim, different parties with interests in the antiques industry got together and commissioned an independent organisation called Carbon Clear Limited to do a thorough product footprint comparison. The questions the parties wanted answered were: "Are antiques greener than new furniture? And if so, what is the difference between their carbon footprints?" ([www.carbonclear.com](http://www.carbonclear.com))

The report, published in September 2010, makes for fascinating reading for anyone interested in what is taken into account when a product's carbon footprint is calculated, especially if that product is 170 years old!

The answers were emphatic. Antiques are green and have a carbon footprint 16 times smaller than that of new furniture.

But beware. Not all antiques are equally green.

As is the case with the food at the fabulous restaurant, when it comes to antiques, local is also better. Buy what's in your vicinity and look for things that were made there, even if it was 170 years ago. As soon as antiques are transported, the footprint increases.

So go out and scout – local is not only lekker, it is better for our planet and thus for all of us.

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