



Business
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**Leather,
naturally**



Brussels Airport
Consulting



A + B HIDES GmbH
& Co. KG

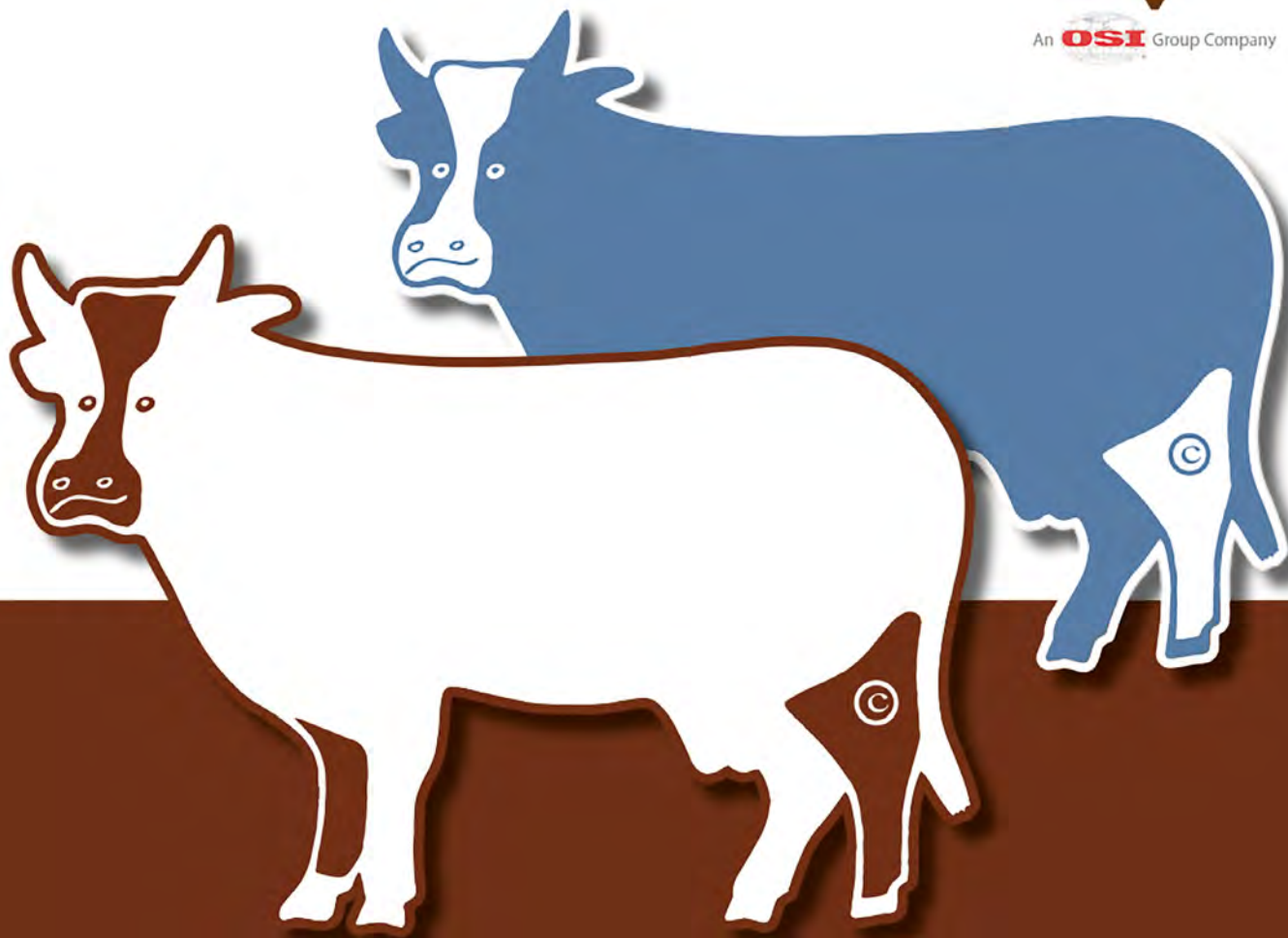


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LEATHER, NATURALLY.



Leather is one of man's earliest and most useful discoveries. Our ancestors used leather to protect themselves from the elements. Primitive man hunted wild animals for food, then made clothing, footwear and crude tents from the hides. Like then, hides used today are a by-product. Animals are raised for the meat, dairy and wool industries, not for their hides. Roughly half of all leather produced today is used to make shoes, and about 25% for clothing. Upholstery demands only around 15% of the total product.

Thanks to a unique arrangement of complex natural fibres that can be combined with the chemical and physical processes that leather workers have perfected over the course of several thousand years, leather stands as one of mankind's greatest substances.

Leather Naturally is an industry members association that focuses on education and the promotion of leather. At all times promoting the use of globally-manufactured sustainable leather they seek to inspire and inform designers,

creators, and consumers about its beauty, quality and versatility as well as ensuring the highest standards of traceability and accountability.

PROPERTIES OF LEATHER

Leather can be made to absorb water, resist water or be completely waterproof. Most leathers manufactured for the shoe, bag, upholstery and leather goods industries offer a degree of water resistance that enables the leather to get wet yet, after drying, retain the properties of elasticity and shape. Many leathers for leather goods are treated to avoid marks from water spotting in light rain.

Waterproofing can be made for specific applications, particularly for outdoor shoes and boots that allow for walking several hours in the rain without getting wet feet. Most waterproof leathers are made from cattle hides.

Cow leather can have a great variation of thicknesses because they can be split in layers. When split thin, leathers can be used for garment, gloves and leather goods. Medium thickness





leathers, on the other hand, are more widely used for upholstery, automotive parts, shoes, bags and leather goods, whereas thick leathers are used for footwear soles and crafts.

The softness of a leather is usually associated with its thickness. The thinner the leather, the softer it will be. But there are other variables that make leather softer, particularly the type of tannage: generally speaking, chrome tanned will be softer; aldehyde type tanning less soft and vegetable tanned leather firmer.

BREATHABILITY

The amount of fatty materials added also influences the softness; the higher the amount of fatty material added to the leather, the greater the softness. Process variations allow us to get a wide range of softness, from a leather glove to a footwear sole from the same raw material.

This is one of leather's unique properties, allowing the leather to absorb the moisture and with time release it into the environment. For shoes, this property creates outstanding comfort that is not replicated by any other material. Perspiration is drawn from the foot into the leather and then evaporates from the outer surface of the shoe. Leather can hold large quantities of moisture without feeling damp, so the foot stays dry and comfortable without the chill of fast evaporation or puddling of cooling perspiration. So, your feet don't sweat in natural leather shoes and boots the way they tend to do when wearing synthetic and rubber footwear.

Often called 'breathability', this characteristic allows moisture and air to permeate through the leather. This property is particularly important for shoes' comfort; as the foot sweats it can produce large amounts of moisture that move through the leather to the outside, keeping the inside

of the shoe drier and more comfortable, with a lower moisture level. Waterproof leathers that are engineered to maintain breathability while providing protection from wet conditions will provide an outstanding combined performance.

There are many variations to the colour, texture, feel, smell, surface resistance and handle of leather that makes this product extremely unique and valuable. Leathers can be as natural as observed in pure vegetable leather or as refined with outstanding performance as an automotive seat. Leather is fashionable in all colours while maintaining outstanding technical performance.

One of the main reasons why leather is comfortable on the human skin is because of its strong thermal insulation capabilities. Heat insulation is a measure of the rate at which heat passes through a material. And because leather contains a large volume of air (which is a poor conductor of heat), the heat travels incredibly slowly through the material.



MALLEABILITY

Another factor that makes leather such a favourable material is because of its ability to be moulded into a new shape. It can be made to either stiffen or can be made to be flexible and will retain its new shape as required. This is very important in footwear, since both feet are rarely exactly the same size and shape. With a little wear they soon adapt to fit perfectly.

A SELF REGULATING INDUSTRY

One of the key roles of Leather Naturally is to educate people about the industry, inform and consult its members regarding best practises within the industry and to ensure that the industry is based on facts and figures. ►►



While the leather industry is certainly not without its faults; it does play an important role in a circular economy which enables other industries to achieve their results of sustainability. The first step of the leather cycle, which is where companies like A + B HIDES comes into it, is to collect hides from the bovine meat and dairy industries. These hides are then collected, sorted and prepared for the remainder of the journey from hide to product.

Further to this, the industry is working very hard to be as accountable as possible with today's leather being able to be traced back to the farm. This has allowed the industry to blacklist farms that mistreat the animals staying there. Technology is always being developed to further enhance the analytical evidence on hand to ensure that the industry is as efficient and sustainable as possible.

BASING A TRADE ON FACTS

The facts of the industry are readily available but despite this Leather Naturally finds themselves often correcting the media when it comes to the leather industry. While this is certainly not their primary function, it is something that they do not allow to slip by unchecked.

Some businesses will set themselves up as "opponents" to leather, pushing their products as leather alternatives that are supposedly better. However, and this is an increasing issue, they don't actually look at the facts but only run with the bias figures. Instead of looking at what the leather industry as a whole is doing to reduce the usage of chemicals, reduce their carbon footprint and only work with farms that treat their animals well, these businesses will showcase the very farms that the leather industry is blacklisting.

Whether these inaccuracies are down to a lack

of comprehensive research or just down to poor writing, Leather Naturally always endeavours to make sure that they are corrected. This is after all part and parcel of changing people's opinions of an industry.

And this is not unique to this sector either. Every sector of any size has as many opponents as it has advocates, but when inaccuracies are published or made public, the businesses within the sector need their association representatives to stand up and make sure that accuracies and facts are valued.

Part of the dilemma faced by these businesses is that leather is already a very sustainable product, as a material it outlasts the alternatives and thus means less need for replacing and it is completely biodegradable. It uses a by-product of other industries that would otherwise go to waste and frankly it is very beautiful.

LEATHER PRODUCTS

Properly made and sourced leather is a truly sustainable material. Hides and skins are mostly a by-product that is dependent on the meat and dairy industry. Transformation into leather is the best use for those hides. The leather industry is creating a product that is both natural and long lasting - leather is unique in its ability to combine beauty, comfort and practicality.

Given the extensive range of raw materials with different properties, and the many processes developed over time leather making is highly versatile and leather manufacturers can produce qualities with widely varied properties and looks.

THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY OF LEATHER

Modern leather manufacturing recycles over 270 million cow hides each year. These are a by-product of the food industry and without the ability of the leather industry to transform them into leather, over 7 million tonnes would go to landfill with huge environmental and biological impact. Leather makes a sustainable contribution to a society that needs to consume less, reuse more and a recycle everything.

REPAIRABLE

The journey towards sustainability starts with products that can be repaired for longevity of use. Leather needs very little in the way of life-time



maintenance and it easy to do at home, it does not draw heavily on resources for laundering and drying for example and we increasingly see the revival of artisan skills/offering repair services for treasured leather goods.

RECYCLABLE

Leather trimmings from the manufacturing process can be repurposed as stuffing, (into boxing punch bags for example) or combined with other materials to make composite products such as leatherboard, which is used for insoles and heel inserts in footwear.

Leather at end of life can be ground down to use in this way too. At the very end of its life leather will biodegrade, depending on type in between 10 & 50 years. We see leather trims being creatively incorporated into wall coverings, plus more and more companies are recycling the leather component from footwear and leathergoods into something new. Read the Peterson & Stoop article.

VERSATILE

The skills of the leather makers take the same basic raw material and turn it into a many different 'fabrics' with different qualities and benefits. Leather can be engineered to be durable enough for furniture yet soft enough for comfort footwear. It will make the finest dress gloves or protective, abrasion resistant motorcycling gloves. Leather



makes the supplest of jackets or the firmest of walking boots.

Leather has a 'breathability' that more easily allows body temperature to be regulated, it will naturally absorb and hold moisture away from the skin until it can evaporate to the outside.

It will also mould to the wearer - whether it's a glove, a shoe, leather jacket or wallet that's been carried in a back pocket for years, leather conforms to its wearer for a very individual comfort and fit.

BEAUTIFUL

Leather has a natural beauty that, unlike many materials, improves with age. Although every hide or skin is different, leather manufacturers work to bring out its best qualities, whether that's a completely aniline or 'naked' appearance to one that is expertly finished to combine durability and easy care.

<https://leathernaturally.org>



A + B HIDES GmbH & Co. KG

The incredible leather journey starts here



The rich smell of leather distinguishes luxury travel in cars and airplanes. Matching leather shoes and a leather belt can turn a shabby suit into a chic statement. Leather wallets usually outlast the money in them, and leather jackets are often passed down through the generations. The use of leather in our lives predates written history and while most of us take it for granted, every item of leather you possess is the end result of a journey.

Bovine leather, produced from cattle hides, is the most valuable by-product of today's meat and dairy industry. Following the age-old ethical responsibility of not letting any part of the animal go to waste, the hides used to be collected from slaughterhouses and butchers. They were then sorted, trimmed and conserved and delivered to tanneries to continue their journey of becoming leather.

Over time, each step of the leather working process has become a craft of its own and we were fortunate enough to speak with A + B HIDES in Germany, a company where the process of

categorising and sorting fresh hides is rooted deeply in their origins.

Maximilian Engelke, sales manager at A + B HIDES has been in the industry for his entire professional career and has an inside perspective on the business and the importance of its place in the industry.

As he explains, the company was founded in 2006 when Marc Aengenheyster (procurator), Toni Baltes (CEO) and his brother Karl-Josef Baltes (senior advisor), brought their family businesses together to form the current entity: A + B HIDES. It was a bold move that combined over 100 years' worth of experience and brought a sophisticated and up to date methodology to this ageless sector.

"The company has quite a legacy behind it," Maximilian explains, "the founding fathers Franz Aengenheyster and Toni Baltes (senior), began collecting hides from local German slaughterhouses and butchers just after the Second World War."



The two founders would collect the hides each morning with their cars and take them back to their premises. Here they would categorise, conserve and then deliver them on to the businesses that formed the next stage. Over time the industry saw the centralisation of slaughterhouses and a decline in butchers thanks to a rise in supermarkets. To keep up with this development, the businesses changed from collecting hides in cars to collecting them in trucks with 20,000 – 30,000 hides being collected every week!

A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

“A + B HIDES employs over one hundred people and we are really the first stage in the creation of leather,” Maximilian explains, “There is a diverse demand for leather and the leather that is used for automotive seats and airplanes is not the same that is used for belts, shoes and wallets. Our position in the supply chain is right at the start preparing them for a streamlined production within the tannery.”

Fresh, raw hides are collected from slaughterhouses and classified as to bull, cow or calf because the hides produced have different characteristics depending on age, sex and breed. After sorting they are put into a cooling system to halt the decomposing process. They are then weighed, trimmed and inspected to see if there are any visible defects on the hair or flesh. These specific details are all taken into account to manufacture a uniform product that ensures a continuous quality standard in later stages of production.

“The preparation of cattle hides for the industrial leather production is our main product,” Maximilian says, “This in itself is a science that needs to be learnt on the job.”



For international customers overseas or those that cannot align their production with the availability of fresh material, A+B HIDES has a custom-built salting procedure that conserves the hides, thus enabling long distance transport and safe storage without compromising quality.

In addition to that, wetblue hides, a semi-finished pre-tanned good completes their product portfolio.

STAFF

Maximilian's background is in frontline sales in the leather trade and thus complements procurator Carsten Cleven, who is Head of Sales at A + B HIDES. Together they expand the company's global presence, through international representation at trade fairs and often directly through visits at the customers' premises. It is an industry that runs on experience and knowhow and this is prevalent from front line sales all the way to the workshop floor.

“Our industry niche is quite specific and basic skills are learnt on the job,” he says,

“Despite demanding conditions that result from manual labour with animal hides and skins all year around, most of our employees have been with us for a long time.”

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

One of the main developments that A+B HIDES are excited about, is their involvement in the traceability of leather hides and the finished leather pieces in general. This is a crucial element in the on-going industry focus to be as sustainable and forward thinking as possible.

“It is the responsibility of all businesses within the leather trade to take accountability for where our products come from. Be them raw-products like ours, or finished products from one of our clients,” Maximilian says, “By being able to trace the hide all the way back to the birth of the animal, we



are able to establish where it was raised, fed and slaughtered.”

For many customers in the automotive and shoe segment this traceability is becoming increasingly important, as it makes the product leather more transparent.

HOW TO ACHIEVE THIS

“Over the last years we developed a specialised laser for this purpose,” Maximilian says, “At the slaughterhouse the ear tag code of the animal is attached to the hide before we pick it up. Once it is with us and hung the ear tag code is scanned and lasered onto the hide.”

Similar to a branding, the laser code remains visible on the hide throughout all stages of the leather production, ensuring full traceability.

Of course, this is only now being implemented. If it wasn't for coronavirus the system would have been live and broadcasted to their customers since March 2020. But due to Lockdown it went live in July and has answered the request from many manufacturers who are relying on the accountability and traceability that these developments provide.

This is a small but essential part in an overall campaign that the leather industry are instigating throughout their supply chain. As one of the pioneers into this move A + B HIDES are effectively setting a standard that others in their industry niche are going to have to try and keep up with.

“You can't hide from progress,” he concludes.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION.

A+B HIDES are part of the OSI Group, the premier global supplier of custom value-added food products. OSI Group covers a whole range of meat and poultry based food solutions, including burgers, nuggets, chicken wings and many others. A+B HIDES works closely with OSI's own slaughterhouses and their partners in the meat industry as well as other reputable suppliers.

Additionally, this year, A + B HIDES completed their LWG trading certification. The Leather Working Group is an international not-for-profit membership organisation for stakeholders across the leather supply chain that places sustainable business practices and environmental compliance as their core values.

WEBSITE: www.aplusb-hides.de

