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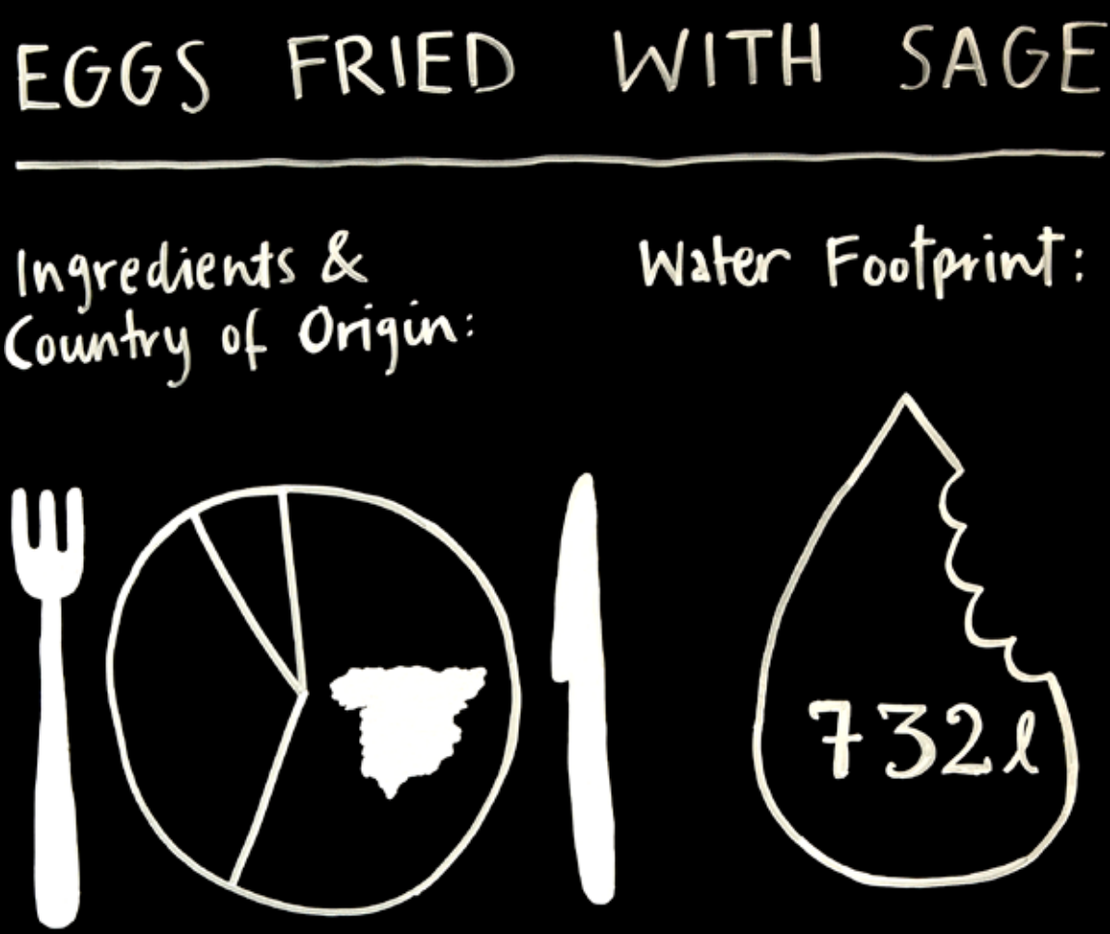

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Water Ways: *Sane and Sanitary*

WATER WAYS

A STREAM OF THOUGHTS

“Whiskey is for drinking. Water is for fighting over” has been wrongly attributed to Mark Twain, though he was a man of many quotes. But fellow writer D.H. Lawrence said this about the matter: “Water is H_2O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one, but there is also a third thing that makes water and nobody knows what that is.” If we are to believe the World Bank, water could be the next issue for fighting over: “If the wars of the 20th century were fought over oil, the wars of this century will be fought over water.” Let’s dive into the wet and approach the substance from two sides, the dream and the reality. Or the sane and the sanitary.

SAN DIEGO DESERT
Photo: Siegrid Demyttenaere

We're all just sentient sacks of water…

Jane Withers about her passion for H_2O

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www.janewithers.com

I describe my own addiction to water as hydrophilic - a lifelong obsession that has taken me bathing in many places, from hammams in Istanbul to Hot springs in Wakayama, from the Gulf of Aden to the Sea of Finland to the Dead Sea. We all know that water is life; it feeds the earth's ecosystem, flows through our cities, our homes, our bodies, and our lives. It's essential to our existence and a portal to our dreams. Yet, largely through the way we use and abuse this most precious and contested resource, we face a global water crisis. In H_2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness, philosopher Ivan Illich argues that since the industrialisation of H_2O and the convenience of water on tap, we take it for granted as this clean, colourless, limitless stuff, and that has led to a deep cultural disconnect, and profound abuse. Almost a decade ago I began to think about the role design might play in helping to shape a sustainable water future. For this issue of DAMN°, I've extracted a handful of ideas and projects I've encountered during this extraordinary curatorial journey: some address global issues; others are about the small pleasures of water; some aim to provide solutions; others are concerned with raising awareness and moving minds. But what they have in common is an imaginative approach to thinking about the future of water.

PROJECT PRESSURE

Glacier melt is one of many effects of climate change that is changing our landscape forever, and in the next decade our world will look very different as many glaciers retreat or disappear altogether. Project Pressure, initiated by photographer Klaus Thymann, will be an open source Glacier Atlas, documenting the vanishing glaciers from all over the planet. It promises to create a remarkable visual record for future generations, providing a glimpse of the way the world was and underscoring the importance of preserving the balance of the global ecosystem. The open source archive, which is an official collaboration with the World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), is due to go live in 2013.

www.projectpressure.org

COTOPAXI ECUADOR, 2009
Photo: Klaus Thymann for Project Pressure

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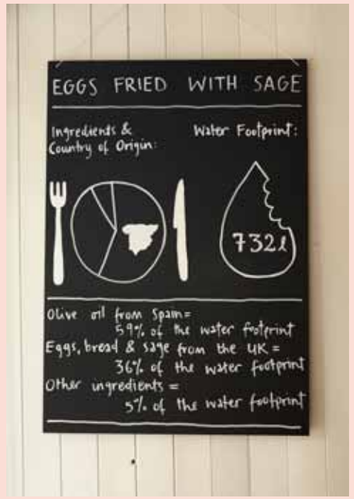

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WONDERWATER CAFÉ IN BEIJING (1/2/3)

WONDERWATER CAFÉ LONDON
Board displaying the breakdown of the water footprint of Fried Eggs with Sage (4)
Fried Eggs with Sage shown next to the graphic depiction of its water footprint from the Wonderwater menu (5)
Exterior of Leila's Shop during the project (6)
Photos: Paola Pieroni

HOW MUCH WATER DO YOU EAT?

Wonderwater is an initiative founded by myself and Kari Korkman, aiming to raise awareness of global water issues and help design the future of water. The first project we collaborated on was Wonderwater Café, a pop-up installation staged in existing cafés, designed to bring to life the critical but little-understood concept of the water footprint, and show how what we choose to eat impacts local and global water environments. Asking the question 'How much water do you EAT?' we worked with water scientists at Helsinki's Aalto University and King's College London to show how much water it takes to produce a cup of coffee or an orange juice, a sandwich or a salad, and where that water comes from. It seems astonishing that it takes over 3000 litres of water to produce the food each of us eats everyday, but it's not necessarily about the size of the water footprint. We need to look behind the figures to understand where our water comes from and whose water we are using for what. In Northern Europe we are relatively fortunate with our local water resources, but about half of the food we consume is imported. We need to ask whether a vegetable or fruit, grain, or meat has its water footprint in a region where water is scarce? Is it draining resources from local communities? Agriculture accounts for over 90% of global water use, so understanding our water consumption is an essential step towards working out how we feed a growing global population. Wonderwater Cafés have been staged at Beijing Design Week, Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, and during the 2012 London Design Festival. We are planning further incarnations, including a modular version that can be hosted by schools and universities.

www.wonderwater.fi

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THE SEA CHAIR PROJECT

This is a project I love because it is a creative response to a range of urgent water-related issues, from marine pollution to the decline of the fishing industry. The Pacific Garbage Patch, a gyre of marine debris in the central North Pacific Ocean, is already twice the size of the United States and growing fast; recently, five more plastic waste grounds have been found accumulating in our oceans. Sea Chair's designers, Studio Swine and Kieren Jones, propose converting retired fishing trawlers into floating factories that will recycle this marine waste into new artefacts. The designers speculate on a future where dormant oilrigs might be adapted to 'harvest' these potentially rich reserves of waste material.

www.seachair.com

Sea Chair featured in Surface Tension: the Future of Water – an exhibition curated by Jane Withers, Michael John Gorman, and Bruce Mistear that showed at the Science Gallery, Dublin and at Eyebeam, New York, bringing together work by artists, designers, engineers, and scientists to explore the future of water, playing on its physical properties, its role in politics and economics, and ways in which it may be harnessed, cleaned, and distributed.

sciencegallery.com/surfacetension/exhibits

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COLLECTING NURDLES* (1)
THE NURDLER (2)
FLOATING FACTORY (3)
MACHINE (4)
PLASTIC SAMPLE (5/6)
THE SEA CHAIR (7)

** particles of plastic*

HIGH WATER LINE

Until it happens, it's hard to imagine the impact of flooding on our cities. But this real world demonstration by artist Eve Mosher has proven ominously prescient. Five years before Hurricane Sandy lashed out unexpectedly last December, Mosher took scientific data on flooding in the New York area and visualised its effect on the streets of Manhattan and Brooklyn by drawing a blue chalk line 10 feet above sea-level to indicate the zone at risk of flooding - a risk increased by stronger and more frequent storms as a result of climate change. The artist walked and chalked almost 70 miles of coastline. By literally taking the discussion out onto the streets, Mosher engages with locals in discussions about climate change and its effects on where we live. This year she plans High Water Line projects in London and Miami.

www.highwaterline.org

TSUNAMI WARNING STONES

I came across this extraordinary ancient flood warning system at the time of the Japanese Tsunami in spring 2011. 'Tsunami stones' that date back hundreds of years are installed along the Northeast coastline of Japan, erected by villagers to serve as warnings to future generations of the danger and destructive force of past tsunamis, and to insure that important information is transmitted from one generation to the next. Some of the stones indicate places that were believed to be out-of-reach of a tsunami. Others instruct people to flee to higher ground in the event of a strong earthquake. Still others bear details of the death and destruction caused by past tsunamis. Of course there are now more high-tech warning systems, but tsunami stones are a poignant reminder: not just of past disasters, but also of the wisdom of ancient cultures and their close connection to water and respect for its dual nature as a nurturing and destructive force.

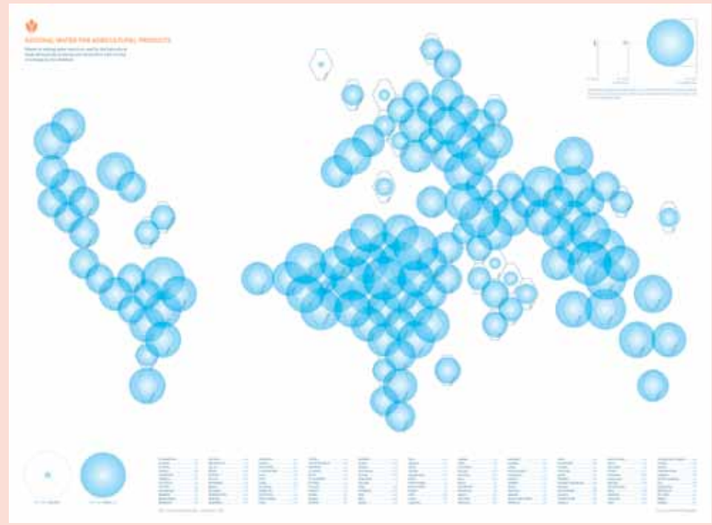
THE GLOBAL WATER FOOTPRINT OF HUMANITY

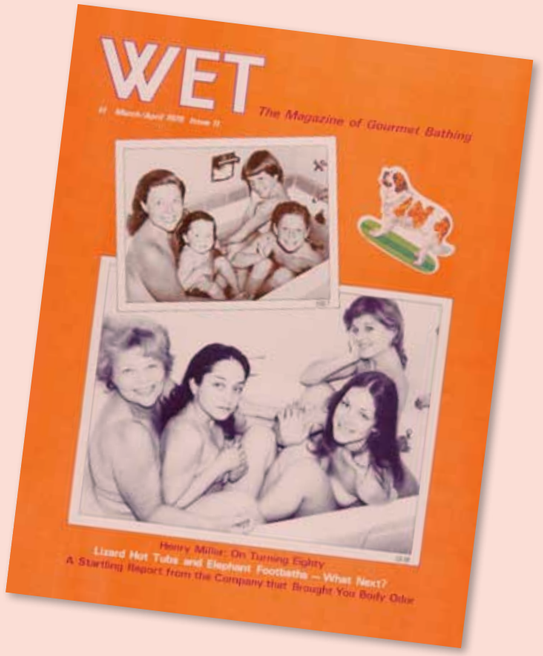
The scale of global water problems is so immense that sometimes it seems we are drowning in data. Graphic designer Angela Morelli has produced an ambitious series of beautifully visualised maps that aim to make tangible the impact of human consumption on the natural water environment – from maps comparing national and foreign water use globally to comparisons of the water footprints of 132 nations. Also check out her animated infographic, The Water We Eat.

www.angelamorelli.com

If you wish to get an overview of our increasing thirst, Hal Watts and Matthew Laws have designed a world map with landmasses made from kitchen sponges. Pouring water on to each country in amounts proportional to its expected urban water consumption in 2030, the sponges grow in height according to how thirsty the country will be, generating a stark topography of future needs. It is estimated that by 2030, 60% of the planet's population will live in cities. This presents unique challenges to water supplies and infrastructures.

www.matthewlaws.com





PLEASURES OF THE BATH

And finally, with gloomy predictions of future drought and water wars, it's easy to forget the rich cultural dimension and sensual pleasures of water that should also be part of our lives. If there's one person who has championed this aspect, it is maverick design philosopher Leonard Koren. Back in the late 1970s he published WET - The Magazine of Gourmet Bathing, described by Koren as "a spirited assault on good taste and linear thinking." Recently reborn in book form as Making WET, it naturally championed the freewheeling pleasures of bathing – but also, bathing as a rich metaphor for so much more. WET was followed in 1998 by the seminal publication Undesigning the Bath, Koren's diatribe against the strictures of design and paean to the animistic pleasures of bathing and the philosophy it encompasses. You are hereby urged to get hold of both books and head off to the bath.

www.leonardkoren.com, wetmagazine.com