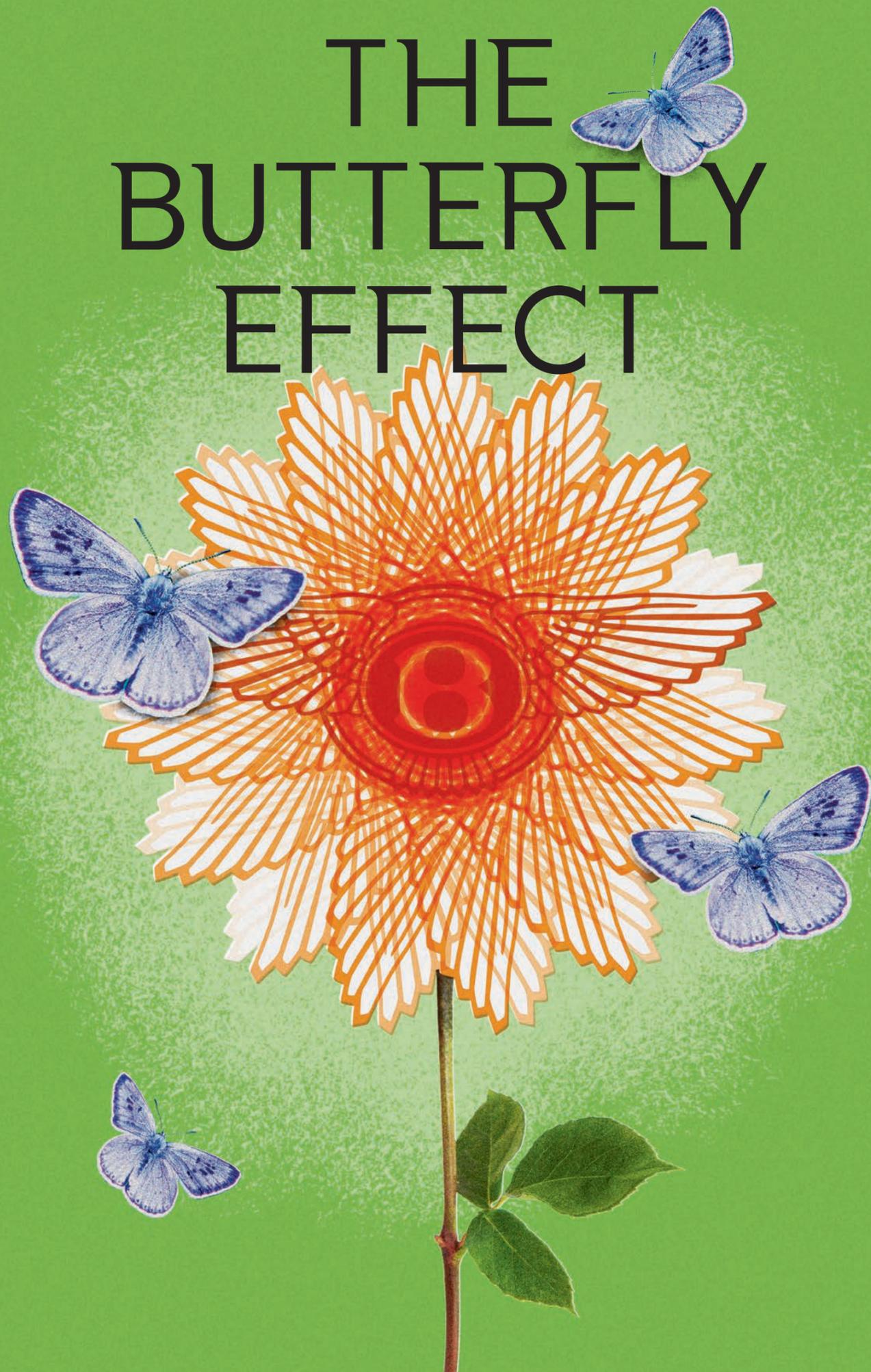


THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT



Entrepreneur Diana Verde Nieto is on a mission to drive social good and environmental responsibility among luxury lifestyle brands. She has been impressed by the 360-degree approach to sustainability taken by Bentley, reports Ben Webb

ILLUSTRATION / Simon Barnes

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hese days, if you put on a beautifully designed Baume watch, you are also taking part in the growing sustainability

movement. The Swiss watchmaker is committed to reducing its environmental footprint, and the strap you just placed on your wrist may have been made from plastics reclaimed from the sea or from cork harvested sustainably from oak trees.

Likewise, the rich grain veneers that surround you in a Bentley are responsibly sourced: Bentley only purchases veneers from countries with reliable sourcing practices.

Welcome to the world of positive luxury, where unconscious bling is a thing of the past. A new wave of high-end brands is determined to behave more ethically, keenly aware that today's consumers want a lot more. Provenance, animal welfare, human rights and local craftsmanship are increasingly viewed as important, and a purchase is no longer just an exchange of money but the moment a customer makes a value judgment.

"Companies cannot afford not to become more sustainable, neither can they afford not to communicate about what they are doing in that area," says Diana Verde Nieto, CEO and founder at Positive Luxury, the company behind the Butterfly Mark, which it awards to luxury brands that benefit people and our world. "The products that people buy are not just things anymore; they are part of a more complex story. They are associated with

what those things say about them. People today want brands that represent their values and beliefs. Luxury is in a great place to deliver such expectations."

BRANDS YOU CAN TRUST

Verde Nieto launched the Positive Luxury site with Karen Hanton in 2011. It is a digital space where brands can showcase their work to consumers who, in turn, can make more informed buying decisions. A site banner sums up the story: Be proud of what you buy. Discover #brandstotrust. "Our ambition was to encourage brands to do better and mobilise people to buy better, by making informed decisions about the brands that have proved they genuinely care about the future," Verde Nieto says.

To earn a coveted Butterfly Mark and appear on





the website, and use the mark on product labelling, a brand must undergo a 'holistic sustainable assessment' into its governance, social and environmental responsibility, community investment and innovation. At first glance, positiveluxury.com seems like a classic luxury site packed with gleaming glass and rich leather, but there is far more to it: the brand stories are fascinating and often surprising.

Louis Vuitton is retrofitting its stores, warehouses and offices to help it reduce its energy consumption and carbon emissions. Belvedere Vodka is also committed to quality craftsmanship, positive brand values and sustainable practices, including supporting a bottle programme that donates a significant proportion of its profits to providing HIV-positive women in Africa with access to life-saving treatment. Each brand has earned Positive Luxury's Butterfly Mark. "It is a trust mark that offers brand transparency at the point-of-sale in a consumer-friendly way," explains Verde Nieto.

QUALITY THAT LASTS

Verde Nieto sees no paradox in the relationship between luxury and sustainability. Many of the younger generation are far more interested in quality that lasts than quantity; she herself still treasures the Cartier watch she received as an 18th birthday present from her father. At any given price, a consumer still asks the same questions: What does this product say about me? Do I still want it if it was made unethically?

The role that brands can play in sustainability is very much in the spotlight. At January's World Economic Forum in Davos, an event where high-profile leaders meet to shape the social and business agenda, Positive Luxury released a new report. The theme is 'Generation Less' and it examines how businesses can work with the next generation through social impact initiatives, innovation and sustainable practices.

Verde Nieto chose Bentley to be one of the case studies. "Bentley is a very interesting company to look at," she says. "It has a fantastic heritage in Crewe and it has a 360-degree view of sustainability that takes in not just its cars but its factory, its supply chain, its people and the local community."

NATURAL EVOLUTION

This year Bentley – a company that will always be judged on the perfection of its products – will celebrate its 100th birthday as a luxury car maker and release its first plug-in hybrid vehicle. For many who love classic cars – and the internal combustion engine – this might seem a radical step. But for Bentley, a company that has always worked to



respond to customers' desires, it is a natural evolution. Bentley already ensures that every new model is 10 to 15 per cent more efficient than its predecessor, but now the company is further transforming its model range. By 2025, Bentley will offer hybrid versions of all its models and a full battery electric vehicle is expected.

Sustainability is also about ensuring a long and useful life for a product. "Around 80 per cent of all Bentleys ever made are still on the road and we will continue to craft cars of incredible quality that are built to last," says Louise M. Burns, Head of Strategic Marketing Projects at Bentley. "But it's not just about the product. At every level of the business you see the same passion for ongoing innovation and improvements in processes and production that we express in the cars themselves."

For example, at Bentley's headquarters in Crewe they take the efficient production of the cars very seriously. More than 30,000 solar panels can provide up to 40 per cent of on-site electricity, the rest is purchased from certified green sources. "By the end of 2019 we intend to have 100% certified green gas and green electricity, which is a major step towards our goal of being a carbon neutral factory," says Sally Hepton, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility for Bentley.

Bentley is also aware of its responsibility to the local area, which, after all, has produced many of the craftsmen and women who have underpinned the success of the brand. "Giving young people the skills, attributes and aspiration to attain careers in engineering is really important to Bentley," continues Hepton. Bentley has run apprenticeship schemes for decades and now has an apprenticeship training centre with dedicated master trainers, passing on bespoke skills to the next generation. Bentley is also one of the founders of a University Technical College in Crewe to train students in the latest engineering and product design challenges. The first students joined Bentley in 2018.

Verde Nieto sums up: "We are growing fast in number, but only have one planet, so all brands have to innovate and improve what they are doing.

"The world is not changing – the world has already changed, and the old rules do not apply any more. Employees of all ages and backgrounds want their work to be meaningful. Customers are seeking brands that inspire them. Our oceans are getting more polluted and species are becoming extinct faster than any other time in history. Society is demanding that companies be responsive to, and responsible for, more than just shareholders. Having seen first-hand through Positive Luxury the amazing work luxury brands are doing and are capable of, I remain optimistic for our future." **B**