

The International Magazine for **Luxury Textiles, Home and Fibres**

# Twist

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## Eastern elegance

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# Swimming downstream

Salmo Leather has developed an eco-friendly method to tan and dye salmon skins to produce a special high-quality leather, based on time-honoured Nanai craftsmanship. Our Germany correspondent **Regine Hövelmann** tells the story of this extraordinary product, which is finding increasing success in both the fashion and interiors industries.

After years of research and development, the German company Salmo Leather has succeeded in standardising the processing of salmon skins for fashion and interior design. The idea that salmon skin should be higher up the value chain served as the inspiration for developing an environmentally-friendly industrial process to transform the skin into luxurious, high-quality leather, while retaining its unique texture.

Salmo Leather is owned by Lischinger GmbH/ Morpol S.A., the global leader in importing and processing salmon, and provides the skin used to create Nanai leather. The company's environmentally friendly farming techniques have earned the Naturland certification for organic salmon.

Salmo Leather, based in Bischofsmain, Germany, is

marketing the leather under the Nanai brand, named after the craftsmanship of the indigenous group of people from Eastern Siberia who have used fish leather since time immemorial.

The development of Nanai leather took three years with the help of the time-honoured traditions of the Nanai people, whose distinctive method used for thousands of years formed the foundation of the industrial tanning process, and the particular support of a descendent of the Nanai who lived in Vienna as an artist. The in-house laboratory at Salmo Leather optimised the unique chrome-free process and scaled it to an industrial level, while experts from German chemical company BASF finalised the research. And so, a new form of leather was born.

The Nanai leather retains the pigmentation and the unique



Table featuring Nanai leather



The Marjol Mechanic autumn/winter 2010/11 collection featuring Nanai leather

texture of the salmon skin, with the benefits of being both hypoallergenic and non-toxic. The company is promoting the message that consumers can surround themselves with the material without a guilty conscience, because Nanai leather is produced from a waste product of fish canneries and not from fish bred solely for their skin. The leather therefore provides a viable alternative to exotic leathers from rays, snakes, ostriches and alligators.

Nanai leather has been comprehensively tested and has fulfilled all the relevant standards, guidelines and material requirements with regards to tensile strength, tear resistance, shrink temperature and abrasion behaviour. The material has a variety of benefits for designers as it is lighter than other types of leather, tear-proof, robust, long-lasting, comfortable to wear and very versatile. The robustness of the material, while being only 0.8 mm thin, is another interesting attribute for the fashion industry.

Salmo Leather has tested the properties and working strength of Nanai leather and found it to be either as good as other types of leather or better in terms of light fastness, abrasion resistance, pH value, adhesion of finish and colour fastness. The material can be bleached, coloured or lacquered with metallic coatings and 130 different products are now available. Managing director Holger Hain says: "For us it was important to offer a reputable quality."

## 'Nanai leather is produced from a waste product of fish canneries and not from fish bred solely for their skin'

Hain says that every year the skin of 60,000 tonnes of fish are accrued from the salmon farms, which results in a surface area of 1,400 sq m of salmon skin being processed at Salmo Leather's base. The price for each skin is between €8-10 and one square metre is €150.

The company wanted to work with a young up-and-coming designer and Nanai leather has recently been launched into the fashion industry, in partnership with German design team Mongrels in Common. The leather was used in the spring/summer 2010 collection entitled *A Siberian Icelandic Marriage*, and its success led to a second collection, for autumn/winter 2010/11.

During Berlin Fashion Week last year, the former Adidas designer, German Michael Michalsky showcased Nanai leather in his autumn/winter 2010/11 fashion and shoe collection. He says: "I was convinced of the unique quality of the leather through working with it on a regular basis. The embossed structure, distinctive surface and robust, yet soft feel make the leather of particular interest to me."

The Nanai brand is continuing to develop the material, with new techniques in the pipeline. Salmo



Leather has also planned a number of projects with well-known designers and companies in the automotive, interiors, accessories and jewellery sectors.

Nanai leather has a unique story to tell, and its traditional and natural elements are particularly appealing to today's luxury consumer, who wants to know more about a product's provenance and heritage. The Nanai people used the leather to make boats, tents and gurnies, as well as jewellery and clothing, and the age-old tradition lives on through the reconstruction and redevelopment of the tanning process, with long-established tanning techniques now combined with innovative technologies and stringent quality controls.

The result is a multi-purpose leather that can be used for a broad range of products and applications, from luxury purses to jewellery, furniture to decorative wallpapers. Today, the Salmo Leather workforce at the head office in Fischhofsmain has grown to 40, with seven sales managers distributing the Nanai leather worldwide to a growing customer base. ●



A bag from the Mongrels in Common spring/summer 2010 collection created from Nanai leather.