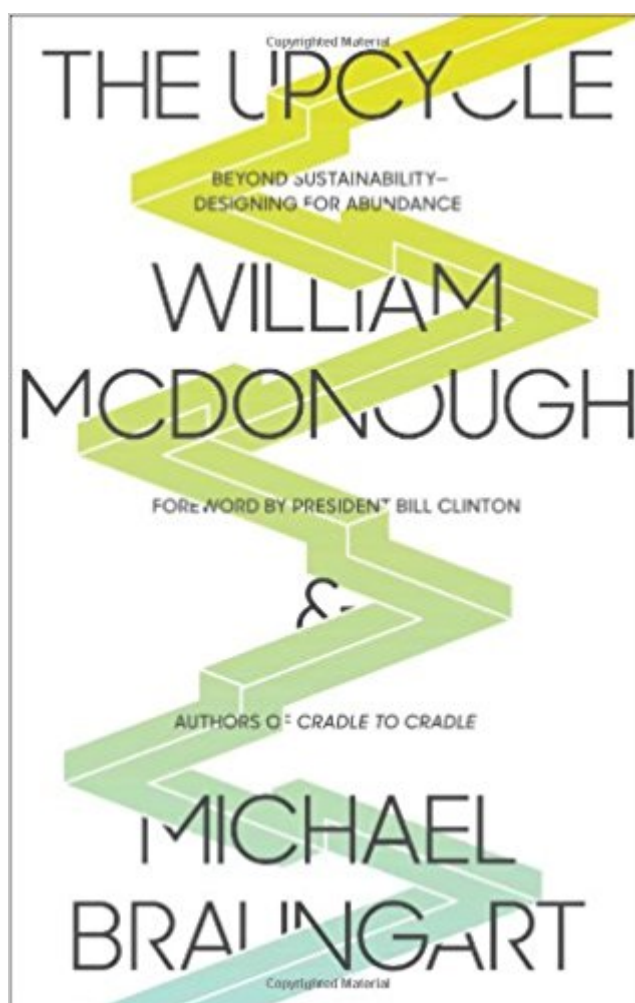


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The Upcycle: Beyond Sustainability--Designing For Abundance



Synopsis

From the authors of *Cradle to Cradle*, we learn what's next: *The Upcycle*. The Upcycle is the eagerly awaited follow-up to *Cradle to Cradle*, one of the most consequential ecological manifestoes of our time. Now, drawing on the green living lessons gained from 10 years of putting the *Cradle to Cradle* concept into practice with businesses, governments, and ordinary people, William McDonough and Michael Braungart envision the next step in the solution to our ecological crisis: We don't just use or reuse and recycle resources with greater effectiveness, we actually improve the natural world as we live, create, and build. For McDonough and Braungart, the questions of resource scarcity and sustainability are questions of design. They are practical-minded visionaries: They envision beneficial designs of products, buildings, and business practices—and they show us these ideas being put to use around the world as everyday objects like chairs, cars, and factories are being reimagined not just to sustain life on the planet but to grow it. It is an eye-opening, inspiring tour of our green future as it unfolds in front of us. The Upcycle is as ambitious as such classics as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*—but its mission is very different. McDonough and Braungart want to turn on its head our very understanding of the human role on earth: Instead of protecting the planet from human impact, why not redesign our activity to improve the environment? We can have a beneficial, sustainable footprint. Abundance for all. The goal is within our reach.

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Customer Reviews

With their landmark work on designing zero-waste merchandise, *Cradle to Cradle* (2002), architect

McDonough and chemist Braungart launched a revolutionary program that encourages manufacturers to substitute environmentally unfriendly products with those that generate as few toxic footprints as possible. In consulting for corporations as far afield as Ford and Nike, the pair has demonstrated that nonpolluting goods, from carpets to shoes, can win consumers over without sacrificing the bottom line. Now the authors take their sustainability philosophy an inspired step further, arguing that industries can do better than simply trimming down the garbage and instead become "part of the natural cycle of regeneration on the planet." Drawing on multiple examples from nature's endless food chain, where one creature's waste becomes nutrition for others, McDonough and Braungart debunk the notion that ecological measures inevitably steal profits from business and joy from life. The authors' many reports on industry innovators give readers a peek into a future where mankind might one day stop destroying the environment and, instead, add to its abundance. --Carl Hays

"Asking how a cherry tree would design an energy-efficient building is only one of the creative 'practices' that McDonough and Braungart spread before their readers. This book will give you renewed hope that, indeed, 'it is darkest before the dawn.'" --Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club on *Cradle to Cradle* "[McDonough and Braungart are] masters of holistic environmentalism . . . [They] have a knack for combining big ideas with commonsense practicality, which leaves readers feeling excited about the future." --Bruce Barcott, *Outside Magazine* on *Cradle to Cradle*

C2C and The Upcycle William McDonough, an American architect, and Michael Braungart, a German chemist, combined to write *Cradle to Cradle* (C2C). C2C, published in 2002, discusses product design, with emphasis on materials utilization efficiency in an environmental context. C2C proposes that product design consider negative effects, especially toxicity, to humans and the natural world at every step in the product's value chain, including disposition when the product is no longer useful. In essence, C2C goes beyond "cradle to grave" design, which ends at a landfill or an incinerator, to "cradle to cradle" design, where non-toxic materials are reclaimed, recycled or reused in generation after generation of products. Recently, the same two authors published *The Upcycle*. *The Upcycle* isn't really a sequel to C2C. Rather, as its title implies, it is an expansion on C2C, based on experience -- in this case, two decades of experience. Think of *The Upcycle* as another generation of the same product, rather like release 1.0 and release 2.0 of a software package. Here are a few of the key ideas from *The Upcycle*:>> More good, rather than less bad: The general

approach to environmental impacts and human well-being is to do less bad -- reduce atmospheric emissions, reduce industrial accidents and reduce waste to landfill, for example. The Upcycle asserts that reduction, even reduction to zero, isn't sufficient. Production should aim beyond shrinking its negative footprint on the world to producing an increasing positive footprint. Where the term "sustainability" confers a sense of steady state, "upcycle" suggests continuing improvement, product generation over product generation>> Design as a latchkey to abundance: I bought The Upcycle because of its subtitle: Beyond Sustainability -- Designing for Abundance. The book proposes that design -- tangible product design, as well as process and systems design -- can lead to upcycling, and that an emphasis on upcycling leads away from a world of scarcity to a world of abundance.>> "Biosphere" vs. "Technosphere": The Upcycle distinguishes between the "biosphere" -- the natural world and its biological cycles -- and the "technosphere" -- the realm of the synthetic. Natural products and natural cycles provide models for design within the technosphere. However, the recovery processes in the two spheres differ significantly, such that mixing natural materials with synthetic materials in the same product may impair upcycling.>> Regarding toxicity: C2C and The Upcycle both regard toxicity as both cumulative and pernicious. Cradle to cradle design relies on detailed assessment of the potential toxicology of all components of every material used in the manufacture of a product. The level of concern goes well beyond most governmental regulations on toxicity, as they existed at the beginning of the current century. The Upcycle provides the term "enchanted skepticism", which describes my general reaction to that book. Many of the ideas are fascinating. I'm quite convinced that radical improvements in materials utilization, across product generations, are possible. Recent product and process design innovations in the automobile industry and in building construction present interesting cases in point, although The Upcycle affords little attention to either. However, favorable examples are one thing. Broad practicability across a wide range of manufactured products may be another.

If you are already familiar with the work of Bill McDonough ("BM") and Michael Braungart ("MB", together "BMMB"), then my glowing praise should come as no surprise and you can probably stop reading my review and go get your copy now. As a bioentrepreneur running a company, I am well read on current thinking involving sustainability, biomimicry, biology, and futurism. All the same I just checked out and devoured this book in a day. My high expectations were not disappointed, and the marathon read spurred my creativity not just in business but all the way through the cycle down to my family life, which was the intention. In 1992 BMMB publicly presented the "Hannover Principles", a sustainability manifesto which advocates transcending basic design principles by also considering

the impact on health and the environment, how the design impacts things on the periphery and identifying those relationships, eliminating waste and optimizing efficiency, and striving to holistically improve the end product. Together they identified and analyzed thousands of industrial materials and produced a ranking system that delineated their qualities along the lines of toxicity and true recyclable sustainability (as opposed to "downcycling", or reusing the materials of a primary product to produce something else with less and less quality/utility in the future). This work led to a major series of high level consultations producing a "butterfly effect" that is positively impacting us all, and will continue to do so ad infinum. Ten years later they wrote "Cradle to Cradle", which looked at how products could be made better by applying the Hannover Principles, and that doing so would make companies more profitable. I still count Cradle to Cradle as one of the best and most fascinating business books I have read, and this was largely due to the outstanding examples of how major corporations like Ford and Interface were able to make strategic changes that resulted in superior products, less harmful materials, less waste, etc. I refer to it as a business book in part because BMMB do not blame capitalism for all our troubles. Quite the opposite, they profoundly advocate it as an essential engine of progress and correctly illustrate through example (in both books) how an intention or lack of one will dictate a positive or negative outcome. Rather than rewrite Cradle to Cradle, the authors set out to explain why it exists, which they richly describe as follows, "The goal of The Upcycle is a delightfully diverse, safe, healthy, and just world with clean air, water, soil, and power - economically, equitably, ecologically, and elegantly enjoyed". Ambitious? BMMB suggest that if Cradle to Cradle principles are widely adopted then this would be the result and that the process would be endless through constant improvement; a true "Virtuous Cycle". In the 10-years following Cradle to Cradle, BMMB have had continuous forward momentum putting these principles into practice not just with major global corporations, but even with governments like China (who desperately need this help, for the sake of our entire biosphere). As such, BMMB have enjoyed a unique position working with and influencing powerful global forces and driving them towards positive progress. "The Upcycle" reflects this refined experience. It is a call to action for all of society to become conscious not just of what they design and produce, but also of how their decisions on consumption affect waste or produce toxicity, and that our choices thus affect future generations and indeed our planet. It asks us to consider not just how we can do a little here or there producing a "less bad" impact, but instead to analyze and discover how we can improve our habits and become a true force of positive impact. A simple example of putting this into practice is to begin zero consumption of products made by companies that fail to adopt these practices, thus depriving them of any economic reward (I haven't given fast food a single penny since 1989, nor do I patronize

certain airlines or banks). When we empower ourselves and hold them accountable they are forced to change or they will disappear, and either outcome is a positive result. There are many ideas present that will inspire business managers and leaders to consider how they can optimize their processes and designs, and thus is arguably the best \$15 you could spend on unleashing your creativity by challenging how you do things from the bottom to the top. As it is intended, it is no less valuable for everyone else as it teaches us to have higher expectations of industry, society, and ourselves. The Forward is by Bill Clinton who says the Optimist's glass is half full, the Pessimist's is half empty, while BMMB's glass is always full of half water and half air. Classic. Just as Cradle to Cradle was printed according to the best available practices of the time, The Upcycle's concepts were employed in printing this non-toxic biodegradable book to the highest standards of today; once again very cool. I'm looking forward to reading it again, which is rare. Enjoy!

The Upcycle: Beyond Sustainability--Designing....; This book and its companion (written first) Cradle to Cradle describe how in practical terms people and businesses can affect the health of the planet. The authors are/have worked with companies and governments to put their theories into practice. It works and those companies who have gone that route have saved money and improved the environment around them. Individuals can also follow many of their ideas to improve our lives and the environment. The choices can be as simple as planting trees, recycling and buying products from companies who follow the authors' stands to putting solar panels on your roof. Read the books, get to work.

It helps to have read McDonough and Braungart's Cradle to Cradle, but not a requirement. This is a good sequel and a logical extension. It's hard to argue with their premise, that we should think first when we design things as to where the products will eventually travel. To the grave or to something better. Something better seems to make sense. Once you understand their premise, the individual success stories are rewarding to read. On the one hand, the book is a lot about McDonough and Braungart, on the other hand, they are clearly two of the leaders in the world of sustainability. I do appreciate the fact that they recognize that in order for companies and people to change their ways, that figuring out how to make a profit is key. Altruism is commendable, but in the end real change, unfortunately, will only come from improving the bottom line.

I keep ordering more copies of this book to give to my smartest friends because the vision it promotes of a world that is not only healthy and sustainable but also productive of beauty and joy is

a world I want to live in.

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