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TEXTILES

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TODAY

Thames & Hudson

Azúa is not alone in thinking that new textile technologies and the tools and ideas for building a better future are close at hand. Sponsored by the European Space Agency Technology Transfer Programme, Italian architect Arturo Vittori of Architecture and Vision has created an experimental inflatable tent intended for use in extreme desert conditions. Like Azúa's *Basic House*, *Desert Seal* (2005) is supported by air, in this case inflatable airbeams. The tent is cooled by its fabric (a polyurethane-coated polyester), by a vent at the top of the tent which allows the passage of air and by a fan powered by newly developed solar film. It weighs 5.5 kg.

'Modern Nomad' is an example of reification: it shows how an idea such as 'population mobility' is changed into a cultural image that in turn inspires the design of objects. The virtue of such generalizations is that they can encompass a range of concerns; the danger is that an idea like this can take on a life of its own and become detached from real needs. Is progress inevitably associated with mobility? Some designers do not think so. Dutch tentmaker Dré Wapenaar's *Tree Tents* (*Boomtenten*) (1998) are made from conventional fabric. They were originally intended to shelter the Road Alert Group, an English association of environmental protestors who campaign to prevent road building through valued natural habitats, but the tents are now leased to holidaymakers.

