



"GREEN" IS THE NEW BLACK: THE NATURAL GROWTH OF ECO-FRIENDLY CLOTHING

By GINA MAZZA

Photos courtesy of international designer Bonnie Siefers of Jonäno

When it comes to fashion, it's quite possible that "green" is the new black. Not only is the manufacturing of eco-friendly clothing on the upswing, so is consumer interest in purchasing it. Yet with so many terms abounding—everything from certified organic, sustainable, Fair Trade and low-impact to local, ethical, artisanal and repurposed—it's no wonder there's still a lot of gray area between green and black.

Furthermore, finding "sustainable fashion" can be challenge, as can sorting out which "green" claims by manufacturers are legit. Currently, there are no standards in place to measure and promote sustainable supply chains in the apparel industry, but the trend is toward producing clothing that considers the environmental and social impact of the production process. If you are interesting in exploring greener clothing choices, here are some basics to consider.

What is Eco-Friendly Clothing?

Environmentally friendly clothing is made from natural materials—think cotton, fleece, bamboo and hemp—that are recycled, organic or do not wreck havoc on the environment. For example, if cotton is used, the cotton plants are not grown using pesticides, only animal manure or compost; and toxic materials such as heavy metals and chemical inks or dyes are not utilized in the manufacturing process. Inks and dyes are typically vegetable-based. Buying organic cotton makes it more likely that you are supporting farmers who don't use as many potentially harmful chemicals. And most would probably agree that wearing garments that have less or no toxic chemicals is a bonus for your health.

Be aware, however, that even clothing made from natural fibers can still have an adverse impact on the environment. That same cotton, for instance, could be treated with fungicides; in fact, a huge amount of fertilizers and pesticides are used on conventionally grown cotton. In other words, just because it's cotton doesn't mean it's eco-friendly.

Clothing labels typically list what fibers were used to make a garment, but what they don't list are the chemical finishes applied to the items.

Adding confusion to the mix, some manufacturers offer clothing made from fabric blends—cotton with recycled fibers, such as polyester—or from a combination of recycled materials like foam and rubber.

So is eco-clothing good for the planet? Well, a great number of factors need to be considered when looking at the sustainability of a material—most notably, the source of the fiber, how this raw fiber is turned into a textile, the labor conditions of the employees producing the materials, and the material's total carbon footprint. Most of us are far removed from the manufacturing process, so we may not think about the social or environmental impact of what we wear: the amount of energy needed for mining and processing natural and synthetic fibers, turning these fabrics into finished products and shipping them



throughout the world, just to name a few. And then there's the added toll to the planet from the use of toxic chemicals such as pesticides, dyes and bleaches. Taking all this into account, you may feel as though it's too huge of an issue for you to make an impact—but you can, simply by starting with your own wardrobe.

How to Look for Eco-Friendly Clothing and Where to Buy It

First, let's look at purchases you may be making now or in the future. Look for clothes made from natural fibers found in nature, such as cotton, hemp, bamboo, jute, flax, ramie, abaca, soy, corn, banana, wool, silk, angora, alpaca, llama, vicuna, cashmere and mohair. Shy away from petroleum-based fibers like acrylic, nylon or anything containing plastics. Also steer clear of no-iron fabrics and highly flame-retardant fabrics, which are treated with formaldehyde finishes. And no matter what you buy, it's always wise to launder new clothing before you wear it to remove excess finishes.

Eco-fashion has come a long way since its hippie-hemp days in the 1990s. With designers like Stella McCartney integrating sustainable practices into their production processes and A-list celebrities like Cameron Diaz wearing it, eco-conscious clothing is becoming increasingly chic. But you don't have to jet off to fashion week in Manhattan, Milan or Paris to check out some cutting-edge attire.

Pittsburgh is home to a haute eco-friendly fashion house: the Scandinavian/American brand Jonäno, founded in 2006 by international designer Bonnie Siefers. The company's philosophy is shaped by

Siefers' passion for the environmental movement, sociology and world affairs. "Jonäno's concept of 'organic essentialism' underpins the collection," says Siefers, who studied renewable clean energy resources and international affairs at Stockholm University in Stockholm, Sweden. "We believe that style and quality are essential to sustainable design. Our company's mission is to create cohesive collections that attract both those devoted to style and fashion, as well as the environmentally conscious consumers." The fabrics used in Jonäno collections come from crops of bamboo, flax, cotton, hemp, waste corn and wild "peace" silk. "They are carefully selected for their luxury and quality, as well as their value-added sustainability factors."

Jonäno's "ecoCouture" has caught on both in the United States and internationally, partly because it appeals to a broad range of women from all lifestyles and ages. The brand has been featured in *WWD*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Spa Magazine* and others, and has been requested for events like Mercedes Benz Fashion Week and Sundance Festivals. To check out their collections, visit www.jonano.com.

If you have a favorite clothing company, get in touch with them directly and inquire about their commitment to sustainable clothing. Let your voice be heard.

Not Going Green? How to Make the Most of the Clothes You Have

Now let's talk about clothing purchases you've already made. Sure, you may not want to clean out your wardrobe and switch completely to eco-friendly clothing, but you still want to do your part in saving the planet. What can you do? Here are some quick tips that can have an enormous impact.

Keep wearing your old clothes: There's no need to have a new wardrobe for school every year or to always be up on the latest fashion trends each season. Consider repairing some of your damaged clothing rather than throwing it out, or buy used clothing at higher-end consignment shops such as Plato's Closet. Since all clothing has a fairly hefty impact on the environment, using them longer is one of the best and easiest things you can do to make your clothing more eco-friendly.

Clean up your laundry routine: Wash in cold water, air-dry whenever possible

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR ECO-FRIENDLY CLOTHING

To make the most of your eco-friendly clothing, it is important to care for it properly. Take these steps to treat the natural materials gently and extend your garments' lives.

- As always, read the label for care instructions. Items with natural fibers like organic cotton require special care, as they are more apt to shrink. Air dry or dry at lower temperatures.
- Don't defeat the purpose of buying eco-clothing by washing them in harsh, toxin-laden detergents. Opt for eco-friendly brands, which, these days, are available at grocery stores such as Whole Foods Market and retail chains such as Target and Wal-Mart, as well as local food co-ops. Look for the Environmental Protection Agency's "Design for the Environment" label, or "DfE."
- Hand wash your items and eliminate the dryer from your laundering process. Not only are dryers tough on clothing, they use energy and release emissions into the air.
- Wash naturally dyed clothing in cold water to avoid color bleeding from natural dyes.



(use an inexpensive collapsible metal rack), buy only phosphate-free detergent, and use an energy efficient front-loading washer and ventless dryer.

Recycle, recycle, recycle: When your clothes are truly worn out, find a place that will recycle them (such as thrift shops and charities) or get crafty by making new stuff out of them.

Yes, you really can help the environment by being conscious of what you wear and how you care for your clothing. By doing so, you'll not only look good on the outside, you'll feel good on the inside. | DHL