

From Basic to Beautiful: Eco-Fashion Today

June 29, 2009

VENICE, ITALY (RPRN)

6/29/2009 - When you think of organic clothing, what comes to mind? Dingy, gray or brown burlap fabric woven into a shapeless potato-sack tunic? Think again! The awesome world of Eco-fashion is right at your fingertips

with on-line designs available at Not Just Pretty, Jonano and Edun. Rawganique offers styles in plus size as well as regular.

Why opt for [organic](#)? Synthetic and chemical pesticides as well as fertilizers are prevalent in regular cotton production. Even more chemicals are used in the manufacturing of blends, such as stretchy cotton fabrics and microfibers. Pesticides have been shown to cause a range of health concerns, such as headaches, nausea, asthma, and certain cancers. Hay fever is no longer the only plausible reason for sneezing and stuffy noses in springtime, as pesticides themselves contribute greatly to these symptoms, intensifying their effects. The United States Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry reports that children exposed to methyl parathion, an insecticide, suffer memory loss and emotional swings. The World Health Organization estimates that pesticides poison at least three million people every year, with 200,000 people dying from pesticide poisoning every year.

When shopping for organic clothing, it is important to note the difference between 'certified organic' and 'sustainable' fabrics. While organic fabrics like cotton, wool, silk and hemp must meet regulations set by the Organic Trade Association regarding fiber processing, production, and chemical-free dyeing, sustainable fabrics are produced without federal guidelines and certification. This isn't to say that sustainable fabrics aren't a good option, just be sure you read all labels thoroughly before buying or ask the store owner for details on the garment's origin and production process. Sustainable clothing uses fabrics made from renewable materials like bamboo, soy and 'tencel', a derivative of wood pulp. Sustainable clothing materials can also be produced by recycling existing synthetic products made from plastic, such as water bottles, labeling and billboard signage.

Though surrounded by much controversy since the early 1970s due to its association with marijuana, [hemp](#) is an increasingly popular, durable natural fiber requiring no pesticides and very little water to grow. It is also a renewable resource, so farmers are able to grow and harvest new crops every year. Bamboo has also become a popular sustainable fabric choice for companies wishing to transition into eco-friendly fashion. Some species of bamboo grow unbelievably quickly, at a rate of two feet per day, and can be farmed without pesticides or chemicals. Bamboo makes excellent sportswear because it is naturally antibacterial and moisture-repellent. Apparel and accessories made from bamboo fibers are also appreciated for their silky feel. However, in order to achieve the stretchy quality that most sports apparel has, spandex or some other elastic blend must be added to it, so if your concern is adhering strictly to 'natural' fibers, it might be best to opt for a bamboo or organic cotton t-shirt and shorts instead.

Since 1991, Benneton Group's [magazine](#), Colors, has been surrounded by

controversy due to its strongly opinionated campaigns ranging from ethnic diversity, ecology, human and animal rights. Activist in their own right, without making the transition to organic manufacture in recent years, Benneton has remained socially responsible and involved in many other initiatives worldwide, including adhering to a strict centralized production guideline, ensuring that their manufacturing standards and practices remain globally consistent and ethical. Some of their more renowned projects include collaborative efforts with organizations such as: World Food Program to combat world hunger, UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) to aid Kosovo war refugees, SOS Racisme in aid of poor African countries, Associazione per la Pace in aid of war victims in Bosnia Herzegovina, and their Clothing Redistribution Project in association with Caritas Switzerland and the International Federation of the Red Cross.

Their communications division, Fabrica, was most recently recognized for its implication in uniting arts and industry by being chosen to host one of the most prestigious international cultural soirées, the official opening gala for the [Biennale d'Arte](#) in Venice, Italy. Guests of this June 4 event were, among many of today's influential designers, Philippe Starck and Nanette Lepore.

The only real drawback to going organic in clothing is the price difference: eco-friendly fashion can represent a hike of 20 to 50% in cost to consumers, but, the longer-lasting product and guilt-free purchase experience go a long way. And, let's not forget that retail



pricing in general has only dropped dramatically in the last 15 years or so, with the majority of production jobs being outsourced to China and India. Prior to the widespread use and abuse of cheap labor in the early 90s, the

clothing industry could not afford to sell its products below even today's price points. The trend we have seen has been one of an almost reverse-inflation phenomenon in needle-trade as compared to some other industries, where previously American-made products once retailing for \$50 are now, a whopping 60% less, some decades later!

With items going on sale at 70% off only a few days after they are first displayed on store shelves, one wonders what kind of a mark-up must these companies have to impose on their products in order to establish and guarantee a certain intrinsic value in the eyes of their target consumer. If something only cost twenty cents to produce, why are we paying 1,000 times more? It only makes sense that, instead of paying a drastically marked-up price on something inferior in quality, we opt for something pesticide-free and chemical-free, biodegradable and all natural at a fair and relative price.

About the author:

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