

Karma Collections

Rather inevitably, green is the new black.

Words: Grace Timothy



Beyond Skin

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Having met drug-hungry models, catty photographers and sadistic designers, I haven't come to associate fashion with ethics as such. So I whinged a bit when our esteemed editor suggested I investigate ethical fashion for our green issue. "But I want to do shoes and bags!" I whined. Rather churlish when one considers the state of our ailing planet. I hope by sharing with you my personal favourites from the good karma collections you'll forget I said that.

Designers like Stella McCartney and Katherine Hamnett have forced the issue of ethics onto the catwalk and 'green' labels like Edun have infiltrated the exclusive department stores. Now this honourable ethos has filtered down to the high street where we find TRAID, a master of ethical fashion. Unwanted clothing is donated by the public to the shops or one of TRAID's 800 banks, which serves to reduce the amount of waste delivered to landfills each year. The clothes sold raise money for projects such as environmental initiatives in Uganda and business training schemes for women in Madagascar. The good work doesn't end there though: "We also go into primary and secondary schools and try to teach the children about the environmental implications of waste," says Communications Manager, Kelly Kay. TRAID is not your usual second-hand shop though; it's not filled by a posse of students riffling through a bunch of nighties that still smell of dying geriatrics. It's achingly cool.

While TRAID is concerned with recycling, People Tree manufactures new seasonal collections to high ecological and Fair Trade standards. Ever since Sienna Miller donned their Fair Trade t-shirts and snagged more A-list ass, People Tree's name has rocketed through the echelons of the glitterati. But their achievements go far beyond covering the backs of the rich and famous. The amount of land growing their organic cotton has doubled in the last five years and in Nepal alone 450 disadvantaged women are offered employment opportunities for the Fair Trade orders put in by People Tree. Jeans label HUG also insists on Fair Trade. The Pima cotton used in their t-shirts and jeans is sourced from Peru, where farmers benefit from generous



Edun



TRAID



People Tree

"HUG make sure that neither the natural habitats harvested nor the fashionability of the clothes is compromised."

People Tree founder, Safia Minney why she thought the less ethical chain stores were still so successful. "Well, it's frustrating but people just get sucked in by cool images, irrespective of the exploitation of people and the environmental damage." I feel my cheeks redden. Nick Pecorelli, director of HUG, predicts success for ethical fashion though. "With the consumer pressure things are going in the right direction. But everyone has their own idea of what is ethical, so we just can't expect it to change overnight." **NC**

fixed prices. Plus the natural habitat isn't compromised, nor is the fashionability of the clothes.

While I can vouch for the appeal of TRAID, People Tree, Edun and HUG, for me ethical shoes usually have all the desirability of an orthopaedic clog. However, Hove's Natalie Dean has proved me wrong with her incredibly fashion-forward shoes. Her company, Beyond Skin uses natural or man made alternatives to leather to produce vegan and vegetarian shoes that are as eco-friendly as possible, whilst remaining undeniably stylish. Sexier than Swampy but potentially as eco-friendly.

When one considers that Fair Trade sales last year only accounted for less than 1.1% of our shopping budgets, the pressure is on for the rest of the high street catch up with these more responsible companies. However consumer watchdog, Litegreen.com recently revealed that the majority of fashion brands are not yet addressing their impact on the planet. While the report cast Marks and Spencer and Monsoon in a good light, Zara, Diesel and Reebok lagged behind. I asked

Stockists: TRAID, 39 Duke Street; Hug, mail order www.hug.co.uk; People Tree at Many Tribes, 15 Belgrave St; Edun, Harvey Nichols (London); Beyond Skin, mail order www.beyondskin.co.uk. To see how ethical your favourite brands are, check out www.litegreen.com. Other good ethical fashion sites include www.thenaturalstore.co.uk; www.greengirlsglobal.com; www.getethical.com; www.terraplana.com and www.enamore.co.uk