

Small Is Beautiful

You might not know these limited-run designers, but that's the point. By Isabel B. Slone



ANNAKIKI FALL 2018

In 1973, a German economist named E. F. Schumacher published a book called *Small Is Beautiful*. In it, he noted that society is careening toward collapse thanks to its extraction of natural resources at an inexhaustible pace. He also proposed that we scrap the current method of production and consumption in favour of “a lifestyle designed for permanence.”

Schumacher's ideas were received as radical, but they've translated remarkably well into the arena of cuisine, where few would doubt the superiority of a locally grown heirloom tomato over a waterlogged facsimile left to ripen under a supermarket's fluorescent lights. The act of ingesting only

the purest ingredients has practically become a secular religion, but when it comes to our closets, most people still tend to turn a blind eye.

Over the past decade, many brands have become more eco-conscious, mitigating their impacts by sourcing organic cotton or offering clothing repairs. But none of these well-intended methods address the fundamental reason why we're in this mess in the first place: the overproduction of goods. According to a 2014 *Forbes* article, as a collective society, we purchase 400 per cent more clothing today than we did 20 years ago. The only way to dig ourselves out is, simply, to produce less.

PHOTOGRAPHY: RUNWAY BY MAXTREE



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“I feel there is so much in the world. We have too much of everything, and it's a scary concept,” says designer Matty Bovan, a Central Saint Martins graduate who chooses to create his colourful, neo-shamanistic clothing out of his parents' house in York, England. “I really believe we shouldn't, as young designers, produce hundreds or thousands of garments.” Instead, Bovan is building his business to avoid both creative burnout and the excessive pileup of stuff. “Young people are struggling with the weight of the world,” he says. “I am trying to understand what it means to be creative in 2018 and how to make it something viable.”

Bovan's business operates—albeit on a smaller scale—similarly to the way in which Mona Kowalska, the New York-based designer of A Détacher, has for the past 20 years. A Détacher has rejected the pace which requires designers to churn out collections on command. The brand has one store in Manhattan, and sells to a tight edit of online retailers and boutiques. “It's never going to be mass,” the designer once told *New York* magazine. Kowalska has managed to cultivate something far more sustainable: a loyal clan of devotees who purchase from the brand season after season. “People design a lot of landfill,” the designer told *Fashionista* in 2015. “I don't want to do that.”

After experiencing a bout of what she describes as “aesthetic fatigue,” Anna Yang, of the Milan-based label ANNAKIKI, decided to shift the focus for her Fall 2018 collection to longevity, craftsmanship and authenticity. “I wanted to create a collection where the outfits would outlast a season,” says Yang. The result was a flashy show rife with oversized furry Muppet coats and sweatshirts that read “over supply” and “consumed by fashion.” Trench coats barrelled down the runway encased in transparent plastic, but what looked like a metaphor for over-consumption was in fact rooted in practicality: Each coat can be worn as at least two garments. Additionally, Yang cut down a production run of her collection by 28 per cent.

“If, however, economic ambitions are good servants, they are bad masters,” wrote British historian R. H. Tawney in 1926. Conventional wisdom suggests the only way a business can succeed is if it is constantly growing. However, exponential growth is impossible on a planet like earth. Eventually the bubble—like Violet Beauregarde, who swells into a giant blueberry in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*—must burst. In 2017, economist Kate Raworth coined the term “doughnut economics,” which proposes to address humanity's challenging future by embedding the economy in the ecosystem to create natural boundaries that society must adhere to. It sounds like what E. F. Schumacher initially suggested back in 1973: economics as if people—and the environment—mattered. □



GOOD SOUL “You have to ask different and difficult questions,” says Christal Earle when talking about her nascent accessories brand Brave Soles. She was in the process of adopting Widlene, a Haitian child she met while doing humanitarian work with stateless people in the garbage dumps of the Dominican Republic, when the 2010 Haitian earthquake struck next door. More than 200,000 people died, 300,000 more were injured and 1.5 million were displaced. In the aftermath, Widlene's Canadian visa was denied and Earle unable to leave the DR with her daughter. She continued her work in the country but was forced to resign from her job in 2014. While exhausting personal finances, she noticed car tires piling up at the dump. Having learned about an old shoe factory, Earle wondered if there was a way to combine old tires with leather shoes, but she didn't have the funds to pursue it.

In March 2017, a visiting Canadian friend left her with \$1,000. “He said, ‘I feel like you will know what to do with this,’” recalls Earle. She went to the shoe factory, put in an order and sold 40 pairs online when it launched that June. Brave Soles's strappy gladiators and slides use upcycled tires for soles, and all of the leather is sourced from tanneries in the United States and Brazil. Handbags use upcycled leather with inner-tube details, and Earle plans to include vegan pineapple leather in future collections.

Earle's non-traditional background helps explain the way she runs her company. Brave Soles's products are made ethically in the DR, where artisans (mostly women) are paid a living wage. Plus, pulling tires out of the waste stream reduces garbage. However, pieces are also affordable, with shoe prices hovering around \$100.

“I wasn't going to capitalize on a really great story to get an inflated price for something,” says Earle. “I can sleep knowing everyone is being treated equitably along the way, including the end consumer.” —Jacquelyn Francis

Scrap Book

More designers are giving used or dead stock materials a new lease on life. **By Caitlin Agnew**



When Cate Blanchett re-wore a four-year-old Armani Privé gown to the Cannes Film Festival this past May, she made a strong statement about clothing waste, saying, “It seems wilful and ridiculous that such garments are not cherished and re-worn for a lifetime.” It’s a pragmatic attitude that resourceful designers are taking to the next level with upcycled clothing, where a second-hand item is remixed and reimaged into something new. With an eye on sustainability, designers and consumers alike are rejecting the idea that the lifespan of a well-made garment needs to be dictated by trends.

Environmentally friendly as well as business savvy (73 per cent of millennials say they are willing to pay more for sustainable goods, and vintage pieces are highly covetable in their own right), this what’s-old-is-new approach has been adopted by buzzy brands around the world. At Zurich-based Vetements, founder Demna Gvasalia fashions new pieces from old Levi’s and vintage fur. Italian fashion house Missoni recently created a limited-edition collection of 25 pieces from upcycled fabric, while Dutch couturiers Viktor & Rolf have repurposed vintage gowns into their fanciful new creations—their last two collections were made using only vintage dead-stock fabrics. Known for making the majority of its cool-girl dresses with sustainable fabric, Los Angeles-based Reformation repurposes vintage pieces for about 2 to 5 per cent of its collections. The brand claims that remanufactured clothing can save close to 6,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

In Canada, Antonio Tadrissi’s Toronto-based fashion label Dust of Gods was the answer to the all-too-common dilemma of having too many clothes in his closet. Rather than get rid of them, he tapped

his artist friend and now business partner Anthony Ricciardi to put a contemporary spin on his beloved pieces. Trained as an architect, Tadrissi has since expanded his sourcing to army surplus stores and markets like Notting Hill’s in London, England. He’ll scour denim jackets and military coats that he transforms with custom patches, tapestries, paint and other embellishments like photos of notorious celebrities and handwritten messages. “I like to see things, break them, put them back together and make them something else,” Tadrissi says of his design process. “Unlike for houses, where a pattern is made and followed, it just happens—on the go.”

At Triarchy’s headquarters in Los Angeles, creative director Adam Taubenfigel designs the brand’s Atelier Denim collection entirely from repurposed jeans he finds at vintage suppliers. He says that a long lifespan is in denim’s DNA. “It’s a workwear fabric—that’s what it is. It’s meant to be durable; it’s meant to last forever.” The one-of-a-kind pieces in the Atelier Denim collection are made of fabric that’s typically 20 or 30 years old, and the results are emblematic of the Triarchy ethos: to make fewer, better things.

In Mariouche Gagné’s case, the fabric of choice is fur. Gagné estimates she’s rescued about 100,000 fur coats since founding her label, Harricana by Mariouche, in 1993. “Fur is probably the best to recycle because it lasts for almost 200 years if it’s well kept,” she explains, adding that a 1950s full-length mink coat can easily be transformed into something more suitable for 21st-century living. It’s proof that in some cases, the right garment can be cherished and re-worn for several lifetimes. □

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brands to upcycle into your wardrobe.

GREG LAUREN

Nephew of the famous Ralph, Greg Lauren launched his L.A.-based line of repurposed men’s and women’s clothing, which is stocked at Barneys New York and Dover Street Market, in 2011.

ALYX

The graphic tees from this New York-based brand’s diffusion line Alyx Visual, which was founded by Lady Gaga and Kanye West in collaboration with Matthew Williams, are made in Italy with 100 per cent upcycled fabric.

KIKI’S KINIS

Mail an oversized shirt to the HQ of this swimwear brand and it will be transformed into a custom-made matching crop top and skirt or a shorts set for \$25.

ZERO WASTE DANIEL

Some might remember ZWD’s scrap-fabric rendering of David Bowie. New York-based Daniel Silverstein is a trash-free advocate of sorts who uses factory scraps to create intricate patchwork joggers and hoodies. One piece from a ZWD collection diverts roughly half a kilogram of fabric from a landfill.

