



ETHICAL

From rock stars to the red-carpet runway, going green is the new black. Hybrid cars, alternative electricity and eco-eventing, it seems the environmental age is upon us and not a moment too soon. Charlize Theron, Leonardo DiCaprio, Woody Harrelson and Cameron Diaz are just a few among the celebrity icons using the limelight for pro-action. Spreading the word that it is up to all of us to make changes in the way we use our planet's resources and setting the trend, they're doing it in style – Eco-style. Tony Budden and Kama Murray report.

The concept of introducing responsibility and consciousness into the fashion industry is a relatively new one. Since the advent of consumerism and global trade, the history of the industry is marked with horror stories. Stories of slave labour in the 19th century cotton fields, abuse of animals in the fur and leather trade,

sweat-shops pervading much of the Third World and environmental degradation destroying our very bio-sphere. Stories that seldom make it to the high street boutiques and which are simply never printed on the hand-wash only designer labels.

Fashion is a temporary and dynamic phenomenon driven by the



From left: The 'No Kak' Fashion Show at the Natural & Organic Products Exhibition. **'Green Leaf'** – Designed by Serena Moodley. Hemp silk blend used to design the tunic piece, decorated with dried banana leaves; the pants are made from green hemp summer cloth, decorated with turmeric dyed cut-out leaves. **'African Winter Gardener'** – Designed by Tarien Malherbe. The dress is made from hemp summer cloth and dyed with beetroot to various intensities. Tree bark and leaves were used to accessories the garment. Arm and leg coverings are made with pure spun sheep's wool, dyed in red wine and coffee. **'Handmade'** – Dress designed by Sabrina Rupprecht, 1st place winner 2007. The garment is made using felted wool and all decorative buttons are self-made from clay. The garment is partially dyed using rooibos to give a beige colour to the wool. **'Global Warming'** – Designed by Zenzile Innocentia Msiza. The hemp summer cloth garment is dyed using beetroot and beaded with beans. **'Daisy Chain'** – Dress designed by Kerys Bagg. This three-piece outfit uses organic cotton and accessorised using beetroot-dyed mohair. The fabric brooch is made from scraps of recycled waste material.

CLOTHING

Fashion Photos: Giles Ridley

ruthless monster of media, so it is hard to imagine that something based in the realm of the ego could even begin to take an ethical turn but, times are changing and with the rise in awareness of environmental issues such as global warming and an increase in social responsibility, we have seen new ways of being emerging, including the demand for organic products. It seems only fitting that the very core of the consumer industry change with the times.

So, how can fashion be considered ethical?

It's really quite simple, Conscious Clothing. Now I don't mean that pair of socks that comes to life after the fourth day of 'wear and no wash'; conscious clothing means garments produced and marketed with consideration for the planet and those that live on it. In other words, fashion that doesn't cost the world.

From the farms to the factories and into the stores, there are many factors which must be taken into account if a garment is to be considered 'conscious' or 'ethical'. This includes: the fibre from which the fabric was made and how that fibre was obtained, the

process by which the fabric was produced, the working conditions and remuneration of the farmers and factory staff, the distance from factory to shop shelf and the durability of the garment itself.

MORAL FIBRE

Besides being environmentally friendly, organic fibres have a host of other benefits. Here's a look at some of them.

Hemp

Historically hemp is believed to be the first plant cultivated by man for fibre, and, for thousands of years it provided the vast majority of the world's textile needs. Industrial hemp refers to the fibre, seeds and stalk of the *Cannabis Sativa* plant. Unfortunately, it is illegal to grow industrial hemp in South Africa due to the refusal of the government to recognise the differences that set it apart from its narcotic cousin, dagga. However, there is lobby for changing

this situation as, internationally, over 30 countries are now taking advantage of all that this incredibly diverse plant has to offer. Job-creation, housing and nutritional problems are but a few of the challenges that would certainly be alleviated were South Africa to follow suit.

It is easy to grow, needing little to none of the pesticides or agrochemicals commonly used on conventionally-grown cotton crops. In comparison with cotton, it yields more fibre per hectare, is less water intensive, has three times the tensile strength (making it more durable) and, being hollow, is odour and mould resistant. Like many of the other organic textiles, it is a great insulator and more absorbent than those made by man.

Due to its versatility, hemp makes for a wonderful fabric for designers to work with which, to the consumer, means availability and options. Hemp clothing is readily available online and at retail outlets around the country.

Cotton

Cotton provides for nearly half of the world's textile needs, but at a cost. The cotton industry uses around 25% of the world's pesticides and insecticides and is very water intensive. In the US, it has been shown that states where cotton is grown have a much higher incidence of cancer, and chlorpyrifos – used in West African cotton – causes brain and fetal damage, impotence and sterility. (Source: Pesticide Action Network UK).

Organic cotton, which is grown using only natural fertilisers, pesticides and phosphates, is on the rise but at the moment demand far exceeds supply. Cotton is susceptible to attacks by pest and it is fairly difficult to grow organically which in the long run also means it costs more. In South Africa there is a move to grow organic cotton, piloted by Woolworths, which will hopefully motivate more farmers to go organic. Africa is currently the world's fourth largest producer of organic cotton. When shopping for organic cotton, look out for reputable certification such as Fair Trade. Visit your local Woolworths for menswear, womenswear and kidswear, and look out for their newly launched 'our green label'.

Bamboo

Textiles made from the fast-growing bamboo plant are becoming increasingly popular although there is a fairly chemically-intensive process involved in order to get the fibres to textile grade.

It is a very easy plant to grow organically and sustainably,

producing 35% more oxygen and absorbing five times the amount of carbon dioxide to that of a regular stand of trees. However the challenge lies in its invasiveness while growing, and once it has been introduced to an area, it is very difficult to eradicate.

Bamboo fabric is prized for its drape, natural sheen and softness, similar to silk but far more durable. It is incredibly absorbent and wicks moisture away from the body four times faster than cotton, but thanks to the anti-bacterial agents, it resists harbouring odours, leaving the wearer drier and odour free. It is hypo-allergenic which is great for those with sensitive skin, but unfortunately this depends on the amount of chemicals used in production. Shrinking during washing and drying is minimal at warm temperatures.

When purchasing bamboo clothing, look for certification from independent but reliable certification companies such as KRAV and Oeko-Tex.

Organic Wool

In order for wool to be organic, the sheep need to be raised under healthy natural conditions and environmentally responsible methods which take into account the soil, air, waterways and naturally-occurring predators.

The land they graze needs to be free from toxic herbicides and pesticides and must not be over-grazed. The wool yarn must at no point be chemically treated. The raw wool must be scoured clean in a biodegradable cleansing agent and spun at an organic mill. Organic wool is hypo-allergenic, unlike conventionally-produced wool which causes sensitivity due to the chemicals used and retained in the finished product.

Raw & Organic Silk

Conventional silk is not ethical as the cocoons are boiled before the moth emerges and in order to get one kilogram of silk, four to five thousand silkworms must die.

Wild silk is silk produced from cocoons that are harvested once the moth has already emerged, but are often slightly discoloured due to the alkaline secreted by the emerging moth and sometimes due to the different food source of the worms.

It creates a wonderful warm and soft fabric with a lovely sheen, best worn directly against the skin. It is extremely comfortable and is ideal for sensitive skin types.

Silk is light and has great thermo-regulating properties.

In South Africa Wild Kalahari or African Wild Silk is becoming

Hemporium focuses on making ethical clothing and accessories from environmentally friendly hemp fabric in order to showcase what this amazing resource can offer South Africa.

Please visit our concept store in Cape Town or

www.hemporium.com for more info.

114 Constantia Main Road
Wynberg 021 7978233

The logo for Hemporium, featuring the brand name in a stylized, cursive font with a small green leaf icon above the letter 'o'.

