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Saving the World in Style

Sean Schmidt

Sustainable Style Foundation

www.sustainablestylefoundation.org

Overconsumption by Western consumers is one of the leading social and environmental challenges facing our world. It has been stated that 20-30% of the world's population consumes 80% of the world's resources. Problems associated with overconsumption only promise to worsen as developing nations such as China and India strive to emulate the Western lifestyle. We know that people will always consume things and buy 'stuff', so we need to convince consumers to 1. buy less stuff and 2. buy better stuff.

Luckily, being socially and environmentally responsible isn't your flowerchild Mother's tie-dye shirt and Birkenstocks anymore. At long last, sustainability is going mainstream. From Giorgio Armani's latest hemp fashions to Lexus' entry into the gas-electric hybrid market to Aspen Skiing Company declaring global warming is real and affecting their industry. A new phenomena is promising to revolutionize the world of sustainability...style.

Yes, style. From fashion, food and film to interior design, architecture, travel, music and more we no longer have to give up looking fabulous and living well in order to do good. Dictionary.com defines 'style' as "a quality of imagination and individuality expressed in one's actions and tastes". 'Style', therefore, is not about conformity, consumption or the latest fly-by-night fashions. True style – the essence of style – is about individualism. It's about expressing yourself, your beliefs, your creativity and your identity through the clothes you choose to wear, the things you surround yourself with in your house or apartment, the car you drive, the food you eat, the places you choose to go on vacation, etc. That's why 'style' is truly something accessible to everyone. Whether you wear Def Leopard t-shirts or Donna Karan originals, the question is how can you express your stylish self more sustainably.

Why approach sustainability from the style angle? In order for sustainability to truly work it has to be accessible to the mainstream. Social and environmental attributes may sell products and services to a portion of the marketplace, but to the rest of the market - the mainstream consumers - it's not enough. A product has to look cool, do something cool or be associated with someone cool. Mainstream consumers still think that in order to be more socially and environmentally responsible the only options are to wear hemp, eat bland food and work in the dark. The first hybrid cars weren't a huge success due to their design. Apparel companies' first attempt at organic cotton failed because no one liked the look. And yet there are thousands of social and environmental nonprofits out there doing good work, trying to change things. Bringing a little style to sustainability can bring attention to these efforts and bringing sustainability to the style world is simply a must. In the end, you have to respect the fact that people like good design in their clothes, their interiors, their cars, etc. By enabling people to create positive change in the world as they make personal style choices, a truly powerful force is unleashed.

Convincing people that 'style' can save the world may prove difficult. Funders aren't quite sure what to think of the style and design community coming to the world's rescue and many activists think that someone working for Prada can't possibly care for the environment. But luckily there are things like Giorgio Armani, Lexus, Aspen Skiing Company and of course, Bonterra and others' tasty organic wines. In Milan, natural food stores are filled with people decked out in Armani, Prada and Zegna, and yet the Milanese, atop their fuel savvy

scooters, will be the first to admit that style is all about quality over quantity. Coco Channel herself said you only need one good suit.

Measuring the success of 'saving the world in style' could prove even more challenging. How do you create big, fast change and then how do you measure it? The most important measure will be increased consumer demand for sustainable products and services. Another important development will be the trendsetters', stylemakers' and designers' embrace of sustainability. Wouldn't it be great if there was an Erin Brokovich type movie every three to five years? If organic cotton became the norm rather than the exception? If Wallpaper magazine was printed on recycled paper?

'Style' professionals are creative and progressive people eager to do good things in our world, only they've never been invited into social and environmental movements. When these things start to happen, many of which already are, we'll know we're getting somewhere.

In a 1971 issue of Vogue, Audrey Hepburn, a woman known for both her style and content of character, made a simple yet poignant statement: "Today there are so many people, so many things, so many emotions, and the more there is, the less I want. The more man files to the moon, the more I want to sit and look at a tree. The more I live in a city, the more I search for a blade of grass." Ms. Hepburn is a perfect example of how you don't have to give up looking fabulous and living well in order to do good. By making sustainability fun, positive and easy, perhaps we can inspire other individuals of 'style and substance' to do the same, whether they're movies stars or the Mom next door.

So as not to leave you, kind readers, without action steps, here are ten tips from the Sustainable Style Foundation to help us all look fabulous, live well and do good:

1. Buy less stuff. Yes, this is the tough one, but if you're serious about reducing your impact on the earth and living more sustainably, this really is step number one. Michael Kors said it best: "it's not about fashion, it's about having style". So, you see, it's not about buying a whole bunch of new stuff all the time; it's about having your own sense of style, whether it be fashion, furniture, food, travel, etc., and going with it.
2. Buy better stuff. We understand, sometimes you just have to spoil yourself with a fantastic meal, or have those Donald J. Pliner shoes or that fabulous Herman Miller chair. So go for it, but do your best to buy well-made, quality products. For some of us, 'better' also means 'better for people and the planet'. That's when we get into organic cotton and non-sweatshop apparel, recycled plastic furniture, fuel efficient vehicles, etc. This leads us to tip number 3...
3. Get the full story. There's always more to the story...sometimes good, sometimes not so good. Take a little time to find out who you're buying from, where the product is from and what is really in it. By simply asking a few questions, you may be surprised at the great things the company you're doing business with has to share.
4. Buy second-hand. Vintage, retro, recycled, restyled...call it what you will, there's a ton of stuff out there from bygone days that is full-on style. Clothing, furniture, cars, etc.
5. Find your cause connection. This is the "do good" part of the "look fabulous, live well, do good" line. Everyone has some issue or cause they're into these days. So why not connect your style choices to your favorite cause. Passionate about breast cancer education? Connect with Ralph Lauren's Pink Pony Fund. Into the environment? Spend an evening supporting your local organic restaurant. Want to raise awareness about AIDS? Stop buy the MAC Cosmetics counter next time you're out and about. Ever had a 'cocktails with a cause' party? Now is your chance to gather your friends around your favorite cause and come up with a 'featured cocktail'. Breast Cancer awareness you say...how about a very pink cosmo?
6. Dis disposable. Did you know that average plastic utensil is used for three minutes then discarded? Hmm...we think we can do better than that. It's certainly great that companies are coming up with disposable everything under the sun, but there are still a lot of things that going the reusable route makes a lot of sense for. If you gotta have disposable forks...how about those fancy new plastic utensils made from cornstarch? See, there are always options.

7. Go local. Must the things we buy come from half way around the world? Sometimes yes, most times, no. From New York to New Orleans to Newport Beach, there are lots of local fashion designers, architects, hotel owners and farmers and more just waiting for your business.

8. Be the Mitsubishi commercial. Remember that great Mitsubishi Lancer commercial in which a bunch of friends are singing Barenaked Ladies' One Week? That needs to be you...carpooling. Good times, reduce traffic, save money on gas, reduce emissions. Take the bus, bike it, buy a hybrid or electric vehicle. How about one of those stylin' scooters? Lots of great options here.

9. Eat your vegetables. Yeah, we know we're omnivores, but the truth is the way industrial meat process works these days, the lower you can eat on the food chain the better for you, the planet and everyone else. That means veggies are in. Even if you don't go vegetarian or vegan, you can change your meat eating habits for the better...you know the drill: local, organic, hormone free. There's more out there than you might think. Same goes for veggies, local and organic when you can.

10. Inspire a friend. Believe it or not, your friends DO look up to you. You always make a statement with what you wear, your pad has a major sense of personality and you are a networker extraordinaire. But you're also a person of style AND substance. Into brands AND beliefs. People DO notice and yes, they DO look up to you. So, keep up the good work, stay strong and be a role model for your friends.

Sean Schmidt is Style Ambassador and Co-founder of the Sustainable Style Foundation, an international nonprofit organization dedicated to making sustainability the 'next big thing', as well as a timeless trend in the many and diverse style industries. Visit the Sustainable Style Foundation at www.sustainablestyle.org.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER:

John Mlade is a green building professional researching and teaching sustainability-related courses at Colorado State University and is a research assistant at the Institute for the Built Environment (www.ibe.colostate.edu). He is also a member of the Biomimicry Guild. Visit www.biomimicry.net for more information.

TO CONTACT THE PUBLISHER:

Email John Mlade at BioInspire@yahoo.com

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