

# Green Is the New Chic

No more hemp sacks! Eco-clothing used to be like high-fiber cereal: crunchy, healthy, and boring. Now it's possible to do good *and* look good. Real good.

**A** CLEANER PLANET can start in our very own closets now that ecologically correct clothing has surpassed its homespun image. There's a real push toward capital-*F* fashion, with hip stores like Barneys New York commissioning earth-friendly collections from high-end designers. And as huge retailers like Wal-Mart (the largest private consumer of electricity in the United States) and JC Penney kick off green initiatives, there's reason to hope that environmentally responsible products and practices will become a mass movement. "What we're seeing is a cultural shift, not just a trend," says green-lifestyle entrepreneur Danny Seo, 30, who is partnering with Penney on its new Simply Green line that includes everything from towels to socks. Fashion is one of the last areas to transition from fad to something more mainstream and concrete. "But once people start asking questions about fabrics or dyes or labor practices, it sort of snowballs," Seo says. "That's how change happens."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREGOR HALENDA

## Stella McCartney

**Who she is:** A designer as skillful with sporty pieces as with luxury ready-to-wear.

**How she's green:** A strict vegetarian, she uses no fur or leather, ever.

McCartney's clothes are all about respect for nature, whether it's saving animals or sustaining the planet.



◀ **McCartney's new eco-collection** for Barneys New York either leaves fabrics natural or uses dyes that don't contaminate water supplies (*far left*, racerback top, \$465; *D-ring-belted jeans*, \$295). Her collaboration with Adidas forges ahead with *near left*, a bamboo, polyester, and cotton tee (\$100), organic cotton cropped pants (\$120), and synthetic flats. (\$100). A wheelie made of recycled nylon (\$420), *below left*, is from her line of bags for LeSportsac. ▶



## John Hardy

◀ **BAMBOO** is a healthy obsession for this Indonesia-based jewelry designer. For every purchase from its handcrafted sterling-silver Bamboo Collection, *left* (wide cuff, \$850; narrow, \$695), the company makes a donation to help plant ecosystem-boosting grass near the island where its workshop is located. Its Bali showroom, *left*, built of bamboo and alang-alang grass, rises out of the surrounding rice fields.



ECO-PIONEERS WHO explore innovative materials and groundbreaking dyes are changing fashion from the ground up. "I am interested in not only the final result but the craft itself," says John Patrick, founder and designer of the Organic collection. "It's a very long chain from seed to shirt." A key factor in environmental style is raw materials—organically produced traditional crops; versatile fibers like bamboo, hemp, and soybean; and fabrics cooked up out of everything from recycled plastic to seaweed. Weaving, quilting, and other time-honored handicrafts with links to indigenous cultures put a personal stamp on garments. And although organic style is usually associated with a natural, beige-to-brown palette, the development of plant-based, nontoxic dyes has ushered in a Technicolor new age...another reason that today's "green" clothing looks less like whole grain cereal and more like fashion.



Linda Loudermilk

◀ NATURE IS BEAUTIFUL, but it isn't always pretty. In fact, it's "the original punk," says this bold, iconoclastic designer—meaning that clothing inspired by the energy of the earth, far from being earnest or dowdy, should be "edgy, loud, fun, playful, and hypercool." That's certainly true of Loudermilk's "luxury eco" collection, launched in 2003. Her shapes are dramatic—she has a background in sculpture as well as costume

design—like the hemp silk trench with an asymmetrical hem (\$978), near left, and the organic cotton lace dress (\$566), far left. Her inventive fabrics include SeaCell, woven from seaweed ("Your skin feels fed"); Sasawashi, a blend of Japanese paper and herbs with antibacterial properties; and milk silk, which owes its sensuous feel to silk, cashmere, and, astonishingly, milk fiber. Call it the crème de la crème.

John Patrick

Who he is: The designer of Organic, which he founded in 2004.  
How he's green: His production—from spinning and weaving to dyeing and sewing—is based mostly in Peru, using organic materials.

"I realized that I could make things I loved, not just racks of products that were disposable after one season."



▶ NEUTRAL COLORS and fresh textures make Organic's casual-chic cotton pieces easy to mix. A chunky knit cardigan (\$295), near right, slides over an embroidered tank (\$225) and cotton pants (\$165). Wide-legged, high-waisted linen trousers (\$270), far right, prove that eco-style can be very on trend; a recycled pima cotton top (\$270) is inspired by peasant blouses. Swatches of colors to dye for, below, have their roots in plant life.

The Best of the Rest



Since 2001 Koi Suwannagate has been turning vintage cashmere into clothes with sculptural fabric embellishments. Organic cotton dress, \$690.



Handstitching is a signature of Alabama Chanin: A curvy jacket shows off the company's clay-dyed organic cotton.





SERIOUS RUNWAY FASHION is embracing a greener viewpoint—or maybe it's simply that the environmental movement has started to look forward rather than back to a lost paradise. Certainly Barneys New York has put its considerable clout to work on behalf of the Earth with a spring campaign that features a number of exclusive green collections. Young, hot, thoughtful designers such as Phillip Lim and Behnaz Sarafpour represent a new generation that's grown up alongside the push for a cleaner planet (Lim, who's 34, wasn't yet born when Earth Day was invented). *Modern* is a word that recurs in their self-descriptions, making it clear that embracing socially responsible production methods doesn't mean sacrificing fabulous style. Sarafpour is particularly engaged by the irregularities and variations that come with using natural materials and dyes (which are less consistent than conventionally manufactured materials). "There is beauty in that organic element of surprise," she says.



► CLASSIC SHAPES with a touch of vintage are Lim's thing; here they put their most enlightened foot forward in pale, natural tones, great for spring weather. The modified biker jacket with an intriguing zip hem (\$495), *near right*, looks perfectly proportioned over a slighter longer shell (\$185) and full cropped pants (\$225). A double-breasted car coat, *far right*, has cool wrist ties and a flattering neckline (\$595).



## Phillip Lim

**Who he is:** His two-year-old company, 3.1 Phillip Lim, won last year's prestigious Swarovski Award for Emerging Talent. **How he's green:** His new collection for Barneys New York, Go Green Go, uses high-quality, undyed organic fabrics.

Lim's easy, streamlined, totally unborring clothes bring a certain sleekness to the organic realm.

## Behnaz Sarafpour

► IT'S RISKY BUSINESS to brave the runway with ecologically correct fashion—but that's exactly what this on-the-rise designer did in her spring show, an array of limited edition clothes done in organic fabrics. Sarafpour, who founded her eponymous ready-to-wear business in 2001, used waffle-weave cotton with appropriately earthy wood beads and pearl embroidery (wrap

dress, *near right*; wrap top, *far right*, \$900) as well as white organic cotton poplin sheeting (skirt, *far right*, \$675). "Today, going green is in many cases used as a marketing strategy," Sarafpour says. "With this collection we aimed to be very honest and to work in a completely natural way, which is quite labor intensive and expensive. But I believe that it's a challenge worth pursuing."



The flats from Niki Robinson for Tê Casan, *far left* (\$245), use recycled fabric; the Corso Como pair, *left* (\$140), are of vegetable-dyed leather.



The vivid color of this handwoven ikat jacket from Madeline Weinrib (\$1,600) comes from madder root and walnuts.



A silk dress produced locally (\$300) reflects Anna Cohen's commitment to her Portland, Oregon, community.



This silk "balloon" shirt (\$660) comes from Noir, a Danish company that supports cotton workers in sub-Saharan Africa.



ECO-INTELLIGENT fashion isn't just clothes minded; it's about activism—whether that means small shifts in our everyday habits or ambitious projects to establish industry in developing countries rather than simply exploiting their raw materials. “Trade can and should supersede aid,” says Ali Hewson, whose label, Edun—founded with her husband, U2’s Bono, and designer Rogan Gregory—has a growing reputation for top quality, offhand cool, and eco-ethical practices: Its aim, she says, is to “lift communities out of poverty.” (Gregory, who has an eco-friendly line with Barneys New York, also has a green line for Target debuting in May.) Closer to home, environmental authority Danny Seo urges us to avoid throwaway fashion, however enticingly cheap and chic; save energy by buying compact fluorescent lightbulbs and unplugging cell-phone chargers when not in use (they still eat electricity); and set ink-jet printers to draft mode, which makes cartridges last longer. Every little bit—one person’s commitment, one company’s policies—really does make an immense difference.



## Rogan Gregory

**Who he is:** Co-founder of Rogan, Loomstate, and Edun (pictured with Ali Hewson).

**How he’s green:** He’s a champion of environmentally responsible practices.

Gregory’s parents, ardent recyclers, were skeptical about a career as a designer, but now they see what fashion can do for the world.



◀ **ETHICAL DENIM** is on the rise. “A small fashion company trying to make a big point” is how Ali Hewson describes Edun, whose spring line includes, *left*, a shapely silk hoodie (\$255), organic cotton tee (\$95), and beautifully cut jeans (\$185). Loomstate makes sure that all stages of manufacturing for its jeans, *above* (white, \$150; blue, \$170), maintain the highest environmental and labor standards. *For details see Shop Guide.*



## The Greenspeak Glossary

We asked Elizabeth Rogers, *above*, coauthor of *The Green Book*, to define key terms so you’ll know what you’re buying.

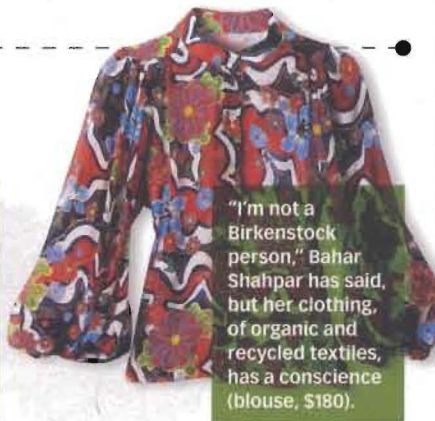
- **FAIR TRADE** refers to products created ethically—with sustainable (see below) farming methods, support for local communities’ economic development, and safe, equitable working conditions.
- **ORGANIC** foods and fibers must be certified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, whose standards prohibit the use of most conventional pesticides or fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients. (A “pesticide-free” label alone, however, doesn’t qualify something as organic.)
- **RECLAIMED OR RECYCLED** materials are rescued from the garbage dump and turned into new products (plastic bottles reborn as fleece jackets; old magazines become packaging).
- **RENEWABLE** resources can be replenished, so they’re not permanently depleted—alternate-energy sources such as solar or wind power instead of nonrenewable oil, or fast-growing plants like bamboo.
- **SUSTAINABLE** practices do no lasting harm to the Earth’s resources, valuing the survival of future generations over immediate needs.
- **VEGAN** is a form of vegetarianism that excludes all animal ingredients or by-products such as leather and wool. **O**



Eileen Fisher now interprets her easy, unfussy fashion philosophy with eco-friendly fibers, like hemp (sweater, \$158).



Cruelty-free carryalls from Matt & Nat, whose handbags have superior style but use no animal products (lead-free PVC bag, \$160).



“I’m not a Birkenstock person,” Bahar Shahpar has said, but her clothing, of organic and recycled textiles, has a conscience (blouse, \$180).