

## BUSINESS

# Welcome to the Green Team

● Sustainable designers like Patrick McDowell, Ka Wa Key, Bleu Chose, A.BCH and more are changing old ways and carving a sustainable future.

BY KALEY ROSHITSH

**Fashion is preparing** for a more sustainable future, and the recent runway shows, trade exhibitions and consumer conversations are capturing the transition in real-time.

The latest collections in Paris revealed “offbeat earthy sobriety,” as in the case with Dior and climate-themed end-of-days oil spills at Marine Serre, while in Milan, “A New Awareness” spotlighted sustainability in a multiday exhibition during fashion week. And the latest edition of the White Milano trade show confirmed sustainable themes.

The fashion industry is showing strides, and many of those steps are being taken by still-nascent sustainable labels, building a circular future from the ground up.

Cutting down on waste and cutting up previous collections, many designers are exploring upcycling and repurposing in their collections, as is the case with Patrick McDowell, Bleu Chose and Maggie Marilyn. Meanwhile, labels such as A.BCH are leading with thoughtful design principles hoping to later implement a system for garment recovery and recycling. Hoping to reduce their carbon footprints, young brands are partnering with organizations such as One Tree Planted in reforestation efforts, as Shopyte has done.

While the long-heralded fashion capitals are putting greater emphasis on sustainable fashion, there are entire shows dedicated to sustainability. Helsinki Fashion Week is one that aims to buoy interest.

## Helsinki Fashion Week Rising in the Ranks

At Helsinki Fashion Week, designers Patrick McDowell, Young n Sang, Ka Wa Key, Bleu Chose, A.BCH, Burlesque Tsunami, Anna Ruohonen and many others premiered their latest collections.

“I think the biggest challenges right now to a more sustainable future is a lack of action and greenwashing,” said Evelyn Mora, consultant and founder of Helsinki Fashion Week, who also cites initial risk and investment as obstacles for greater action.

Mora, in between speaking on panels and organizing the upcoming symposiums for HFW, anticipates the upcoming Circular Fashion Summit in Paris, along with the publishing of her first book, “The Trouble Maker,” next year, which will detail her trail-blazing sustainability efforts.

Like many with an appetite for sustainable fashion, Mora has her eyes peeled for fashion weeks to better showcase sustainable brands – and not just on the runway – she calls for deep dives into production processes to see what makes them truly “green.”

## Patrick McDowell: Trash to Treasure

All fabrics from London-based label Patrick McDowell are sourced from Burberry studio waste and Swarovski unsellable crystals. Some pieces from McDowell’s first collection were taken apart and remade for the second one, while others were simply carried forward.



Maggie Marilyn



Patrick McDowell



Ka Wa Key

Clothing is made in England and also up for rental from the Higher studio in London, which partners with emerging brands such as Congregation, Martina Spetlova, Minki, Ovelia Transtoto, Ode to Odd, Patrick McDowell and Phoebe English.

A Central Saint Martins graduate, McDowell debuted his label in 2018 at London Fashion Week. It was founded on “a devotion to rethinking systems, not just fabrics.” His latest collection was inspired by his father’s firefighting career and his mother’s five sisters who “put out the metaphorical fires in our daily lives,” according to the designer. One of the statements in his “Fire-fighting Aunties” collection includes a Swarovski-bedazzled firefighter hat.

The designer is no stranger to collaborations and recently partnered with shopping app Depop and Selfridges to run an upcycling workshop in store – turning trash to treasure, and calling for system change.

McDowell also sourced eco-down insulation from Thermore, sustainably sourced yarn from Wool And the Gang and heritage fabrics from AW Hainsworth for his latest collection.

## Ka Wa Key: To Dye For

Ka Wa Key gets its name from one of the designers, and while “Ka Wa” means “flourished family” in Cantonese, the brand is much more than a name. It is what the design duo, Ka Wa and Jarno Jussi, call a “romantic dream” that anyone can participate in.

Its men’s spring 2020 collection features airy tie-dye pieces that Ka Wa Key creates with the aid of a printing factory using Zero-D technology with clean and efficient dry dye without the usage of water, solvents, heavy metals or mordents.

“As a brand, we are investing more and more in sustainable design practices,” a company spokesman said, while also pointing to the designers’ own day-to-day personal behaviors: “Small baby steps usually will lead to bigger steps and even leaps.”

When asked what would make the fashion industry more sustainable, the reply was: “Don’t make rubbish.” The label prioritizes ethical and sustainable fashion using traceable recycled materials such as recycled wool and polyester as well as renewable materials (Tencel, EcoVero, viscose, organic cotton).

## Unravelau: One Step at a Time

Dutch sustainable clothing brand Unravelau also exclusively uses organic and recycled materials. Founded in 2017 by Laura Meijering, the brand is based in Utrecht, Netherlands.

“We try to generate the least possible waste when creating a garment by using zero-waste patterns and reusing the waste we do generate [like threads] in other garments. Even the tags on the garments are made of recycled paper and printed with environmentally friendly ink,” Meijering told WWD.

## Bleu Chose: Upcycled and Accredited

Founded at the end of 2018 in Paris by designer Meryl Flambert, Bleu Chose reimagines deadstock materials and only uses GOTS-certified textiles and Oeko-Tex-certified textile dyes, a certification that ensures no harmful substances exist for the consumer or the environment. Curbing surplus, the brand produces a limited run of its collections.

The latest collection poses a utopian fantasy whereby two contrasting muses, Angela Davis and Marie Antoinette, join forces to awaken a new consciousness.

## A.BCH: Leading With Good Design

Melbourne-based A.BCH was founded in 2017 by Courtney Holm. The label’s ▶



Shopyte



Riona Treacy

latest collection was created to depict the internal struggle of grappling with climate change yet living life as normal. Transparencies and textures create filmy layers and colors are kept very monochromatic.

Holm's advice to the industry is simple: "Make less stuff."

"As a circular fashion label, everything we do revolves around the idea that if we don't know what will happen to the garment at the end of its life, then we won't make it. The same goes for our supply chain and every small thing we do," Holm said.

A.BCH aims to build a closed-loop system to recover and recycle garments and help others realize full circularity. Another designer aiming for full circularity is Maggie Marilyn.

#### **Maggie Marilyn: Path Toward Fully Circular**

New Zealand-based label Maggie Marilyn was founded in 2016 by Maggie Hewitt on the premise of "making a difference in an industry that I believe is ready for change," in the words of the designer herself.

The label's sustainability strategy leads it to the end of 2020, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, what Hewitt calls "the guiding lights toward protecting our planet as we know it." Retailers already on board with her vision include stockists such as Shoppop and Net-a-porter, among others.

On its path toward becoming fully circular one day, 50 percent of its collections are on track to be created from recycled or repurposed fabrics by the

end of 2020. Hewitt believes the only way forward is a circular-based economy.

In her spring 2020 collection, sustainable fabrics are used alongside repurposed materials of earlier seasons, additional deadstock fabrics and post-consumer waste. The label anticipates its latest resort collection, which drops in late October.

WWD also featured Maggie Marilyn in an earlier roundup of emerging sustainable fashion brands.

London Fashion Week also made its commitment to sustainability clear, with a slate of sustainable brands showcasing their spring 2020 collections, including Shopyte and Riona Treacy.

#### **Shopyte: Reforestation**

When buying a garment on Spanish-founded Shopyte.eu, a donation is made to

the organization One Tree Planted that will plant a tree on the shopper's behalf. The latest collection was inspired by "the jungle of the city," according to Dovile Sopyte, designer and founder at Shopyte.

The brand is also buying eco-credits, sourcing from ethical manufacturers and designing with only natural fabrics.

#### **Riona Treacy: No Excess**

Belfast transplant Riona Treacy has been living in London for the past decade, crafting bespoke women's garments with a conscious edge. The label has nixed unnecessary plastics in product and courier packaging while keeping manufacturing in London. As for the fabric cut-offs? They are repurposed for small accessories or donated to local schools. ■