

excerpts from

GREEN CHIC: SAVING THE EARTH IN STYLE

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① GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK

I recently read an article that advised readers to stop buying things if they wanted to lessen their negative impact on the environment. Seriously, that was the advice. / Stop shopping for everything except absolute essentials like food and toilet paper, and make do with what you already have. Um...yeah, right. True, consuming just about anything is eco-detrimental (production, packaging, and shipping all take their toll) but that doesn't mean I'm going to wear last year's designer denim for the next eight seasons. Please.

② Here's a more realistic plan: Be thoughtful about the clothes and accessories you buy and the habits you use when buying and taking care of them. (This chapter's got tips on how to do that.) Along with the process of lightening your environmental footprint, there's a surprising added bonus—you'll probably cut way down on buyer's remorse. My "why the hell is that in my closet?" purchases are close to zero since I've started being an eco-conscious shopper. I get more compliments and "*where did you find that?*" questions from my friends, including my fashion editor friends.

③ Keep in mind that this chapter is *not* about getting rid of all the "non-green" clothing you own and buying an entirely new ecofriendly wardrobe. That wouldn't be green at all. But when you do get a craving for something fabulous, here are a bunch of ideas to help you become a greener fashionista.

Because, although going green should never be just a fashion statement, green really is the new black.

EDIT YOUR CLOSET

- ⑤ One of the first things a personal shopper or personal stylist—you have both of those, right?—will do for you is go through your closet and pare it down so it only contains things you love, love, love to wear. (I know this not because I have a staff of stylists and shoppers, but because I've interviewed them for fashion stories and paid attention, so I could use their advice and not have to pay for it.) There are definitely perks to my job. Sometimes, anyway.

- ⑥ The idea is that if you love *everything* in your closet—even if you end up with a third of the clothes you had before you started the editing process—you'll have a much easier time getting dressed in the morning and you'll always look (and believe that you look) stunning.

This is definitely a less-is-more situation. Crap in your closet—pieces that don't fit, don't flatter, or make you feel like you're wearing a tent—distracts from the amazing stuff that's already in there. And if you're distracted from the amazing stuff that's already in there, you might think you need to go on a shopping spree to save you from wardrobe hatred. This is not a green solution. Edit first, 'kay?

- ⑥ To get started, go through *every single item* in your closet. If you hate it and you know it, put it into the NO pile. (At the end, please donate said NO pile to a women's shelter, bring it to a clothing swap, or consign it. Do not toss it into the trash so it makes its way to a landfill. Thank you.) If you love it and you know it, put it into a YES pile. I do not believe in a MAYBE pile—you know you're just going to keep it, and then what's the point? If you're not sure about a piece, try it on and assess how it looks, how it makes you feel, and what you can wear it with. If you look smokin' and you can think of an upcoming situation where you'll want to wear it, and you have stuff that looks good with it, it's a yes. If you don't like how it looks, or you know, realistically that you just won't wear it, it's a no. Don't cry. Let it go. You don't love it, and it certainly doesn't love you back.

If something you love is in a state of disrepair, assess whether it can be fixed. If so, *get it fixed* instead of buying a new one. If not, say goodbye. And learn from the experience: Take care of the clothing you love, and be fastidious about

SAVING THE EARTH IN STYLE
getting it straightened up at the first sign of an unraveling thread, missing button, or wee little hole.

Finally, don't stop editing. Go in early (before malaise sets in) and often, and weed out anything not stupendous. And the next time you shop (and forever thereafter), don't buy *anything* you think might wind up in a NO pile. It will only get in the way of your relationship with the clothes you love. (The ones in which you are so chic. Admit it.)

BAG BAGS, COMPLETELY

Remember those *Sex and the City* scenes where Carrie Bradshaw would come breezing through her door and drop an armload of Manolo Blahnik and Barneys bags? I'm not going to suggest you give up shopping sprees altogether, but it's a good idea to avoid that kind of bag orgy. Shopping bags—both paper and plastic—are bigger environmental offenders than you might realize. I mention this briefly and suggest popping little purchases into your purse. But I think you're ready to take it to the next level. Are you with me? We should bang knuckles or something right now. Instead I'll explain why.

Let's start with plastic: According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), close to a trillion plastic bags are used worldwide each year. The United States uses about one hundred billion of those. That's—yikes—almost one thousand plastic bags per year per U.S. household—meaning even one household opting out of plastic bags makes a noticeable dent. It takes twelve million barrels of oil to produce the plastic bags the United States alone uses each year. Fewer than 3 percent of plastic bags are recycled—meaning they end up in landfills (where they can take hundreds of years to degrade) and often in streams, rivers, and oceans, where they choke and poison about one hundred thousand whales, birds, and turtles each year and act as rafts to carry foreign species to places where they can do damage to existing ecosystems. What's more, most plastic bags are made from polyethylene, which is derived from petroleum or natural gas (you know by now these are nonrenewable resources). When they do break down—and they don't safely or completely biodegrade—they release toxic chemicals into the earth's air, soil, and water.

And then there's paper: I used to think these were better for the environment than plastic because they are biodegradable. Nope. Making ten billion paper bags (about the number of grocery bags Americans use in a year) requires fourteen

million trees to be cut down. And then manufacturing them, which involves heating wood chips in a chemical solution at a high temperature, takes four times more energy than manufacturing plastic bags, and produces 70 percent more air pollutants and 50 percent more water pollutants. Only 20 percent of paper bags are recycled, and they take up nine times as much space in landfills as plastic bags do.

If everyone in New York City alone used *just one* less shopping bag per year, it would eliminate 5 million pounds of waste (counting the bags themselves, the tree waste, and the stuff that goes into making them) and save the city \$250,000 in disposal costs. Bags that are a hybrid of paper and plastic (like so many fancy laminated shopping bags are) are the worst, because they are rarely recyclable.

The solution? Don't use shopping bags at all.

This is an easy green shopping strategy to employ. Every single time you head out to go shopping (whether you're just browsing or picking up a bottle of wine and a wedge of cheese or going for a serious wardrobe or home overhaul), be prepared with a sturdy, reusable bag. I'm a huge fan of the L.L. Bean Boat & Tote bags, and I have them in every size (and several colors). If uber-elegant is the only thing that works for you, consider this the perfect excuse to invest in that beautiful bag you've been coveting. You'd be doing it to save the earth! Keep it right by your door and use it exclusively for shopping, so it's always clean, empty, and waiting for you.

Tip: Let the sales person know—nicely!—as soon as you get to the register that you don't need a bag. That way they won't beat you to the punch and start swaddling your purchase in tissue paper and ribbon while you're looking down to hunt for your credit card.

OPT FOR ORGANIC COTTON

It's easy to assume that all natural fibers, including cotton, are ecofriendly. That's what I used to think, and I was probably even kind of snooty about it. Turns out I was off the mark. Some natural fibers are fantastic, but conventionally grown cotton is not. It's actually an environmental disaster.

Here's why: Growing conventional cotton is *the* most pesticide intensive farming process in the world. Only about 3 percent of the world's farmland is used for growing cotton, yet conventional cotton growth uses about 24 percent of all

pesticides—which permeate the air, damage the soil, and seep into the water supply. Every pound of cotton (which is about how much it takes to make one T-shirt) is sprayed with a third of a pound of pesticides—and a total of 50 million pounds of pesticides are used on cotton in the United States alone. Then there are the chemical fertilizers—more than 2 billion pounds (142 pounds per acre) are used annually to grow conventional cotton in the United States.

By the way, all those pesticides and fertilizers in the cotton fields translate to about a third of a cup of chemical (which include such known cancer-causing agents as cyanide, dicofol, naled, propargite, and trifluralin) remaining in your cute little cotton tee. Which you're probably wearing right next to your skin.

Organic cotton is grown without any pesticides or chemical fertilizers, meaning none of that seeps into the air, the water, the soil, or your skin. The organic cotton industry is growing rapidly (the women's apparel segment of it is growing the fastest, at about 35 percent per year) and it's getting easier and easier to find organic cotton in the form of luxe goods such as silky soft tees. Plus, it's appearing in totally affordable products such as American Apparel (americanapparel.com) tees (around \$15) and sexy little thongs (\$8), Wal-Mart pajamas (about \$12), and Danskin yoga pants (\$14-ish).

Shopping for organic cotton at Wal-Mart doesn't excite you? Okay, you can also find such fashion forward designers as Loomstate (organic jeans designed by Rogan Gregory; loomstate.org), Edun (the cutting-edge label founded by Bono's wife, Ali Hewson; edun.com), Linda Loudermilk (some Hollywood celebs wore her to the Oscars; lindaloudermilk.com), and my personal favorite, Stewart+Brown (a California-based line featuring perfectly cut, expensive-but-worth-it tees, skirts, and sweaters; stewartbrown.com). More designer denim options include the incredibly flattering jeans from Del Forte (delforte.com) and the new organic denim line from everybody's favorite maker of jeans, Levi's (levi.com).

Tip: Try it out! For a short period of time, like two months, commit to buying only organic if you're picking up any item of cotton clothing (jeans, tees, underwear). You'll probably find yourself wasting less money on cheap trendy items that you'll never wear—and you'll love the way the fabric feels next to your body. And you may get other benefits: Will tends to give me more spontaneous backrubs when I'm wearing an organic cotton tee. Then there are the compliments—I was wearing a Stewart+Brown organic cotton

skirt at dinner the other night and my friend Kate couldn't stop touching it. Of course she asked where I got it because it was so soft and such a great skirt, and she wanted one. I found it at Envi (shopenvi.com), a new eco-boutique on Newbury Street in Boston that has a great online shop as well. (Stewart+Brown is also sold at boutiques all over the country—check stewartbrown.com to find a retail location near you.) Anyway, chances are you'll be a total convert after your self-imposed only-organic restricted period, but if not, you can always go back to conventional for some of your purchases—just try to buy organic whenever it's convenient.

Shopping strategy: Is there a boutique near you that carries chic organic cotton pieces? Let them know you love it, and tell your friends to support their efforts, too.

Tip: Just because a cotton item is a natural color doesn't mean it's organic. I know you already figured that out, but I just read an article about "green" fashion in a certain high-end lifestyle magazine, and the page was filled with clothes in shades of cream, tan, and taupe—but not even half of them were organic. Read the label. If it's organic, it will say so.

GET GREEN BLING

I hate to be the one to tell you this, but diamonds are not a green girl's best friend. And all that's gold is *not* green. Sorry.

Unfortunately, obtaining the natural elements—diamonds, other gemstones, platinum—that go into traditional beautiful jewelry is not an environmentally beautiful practice. Accessing such materials requires mining, which consumes huge amounts of energy, releases pollutants and greenhouse gases into the air, allows toxic chemicals to seep into groundwater, damages land and speeds up erosion, and generates an unbelievable amount of waste. The use of chemicals such as cyanide and mercury to separate gold from rock is a terrible health hazard for miners who are breathing it in as well as being an environmental hazard.

Mining is also associated with many socially devastating practices, especially in African countries such as Angola and Sierra Leone, where the diamond industry has been known to fund violence against innocent civilians. The United Nations calls these conflict diamonds, and they define them as "diamonds that originate from areas controlled by forces or factions opposed to legitimate and

INTERNET IN STYLE

internationally recognized governments, and are used to fund military action in opposition to those governments, or in contravention of the decisions of the Security Council.” This is too huge a topic to address in great detail here—but if you’re going to buy a new diamond, make sure it comes with a certificate of origin, and is certified conflict-free. Keep reading to find out where to buy.

Mining is not a small industry. In the United States, mining consumes about 5 percent of the total electricity the country uses. In countries such as South Africa, where there’s a richer concentration of “valuable” materials, the consumption is much higher—around 25 percent of total energy consumption. Not all this mining is for jewelry—but a surprisingly large amount of it is: Of the 2,500 tons of gold that are mined each year, for example, 80 percent of it goes into jewelry. And according to Oxfam America, the production of one little 18-karat ring that weighs less than an ounce creates more than 20 tons of mine waste. One ring.

Fear not: This doesn’t mean you have to stop getting jewelry as a gift (or treating yourself to that perfect bauble to celebrate...whatever). There are eco-chic jewelers out there making gorgeous pieces—not the clunky beaded stuff you might imagine green types have to wear. There are sparkly rings, sleek bracelets, and shiny earrings made from recycled gold and platinum and “created” diamonds and gemstones—synthetic stones that match the quality of the natural kind are now available from high-end companies such as Apollo (apollodiamond.com). Trust me (the gal who doesn’t particularly like synthetics): They can be gorgeous.

GreenKarat (greenkarat.com) uses synthetic diamonds and gems as well as recycled gold and platinum in everything from minimalist diamond-studded wedding bands to eye-popping triple stone rings. Brilliant Earth (brilliantearth.com) offers engagement rings and wedding bands made from recycled metals and conflict-free diamonds (these are my personal favorites); Leber Jeweler (leberjeweler.com) has an Earthwise line of classic diamond studs, engagement rings, and gemstone pendants made of reclaimed metals and conflict-free stones. And—ready for some happy news?—Tiffany (tiffany.com) is making great strides toward ecofriendliness. Their diamonds are certified conflict-free (and their efforts in promoting this have led to more stringent oversight of the diamond industry in general), they mine metals responsibly, they are part of the No Dirty Gold campaign, and they don’t use coral because its harvesting can damage marine habitats. Oh, and those little blue boxes are made from Forest Stewardship Council-certified paper.

Another alternative—one that demands an even smaller ecological price than even ecofriendly new gems—is to choose antique jewelry. Made from metals and stones mined decades (or centuries) ago, it's an extremely low-impact choice and a great way to find pieces that won't look like something everyone (or anyone) you know is wearing. Or you could take a stone that your mother or grandmother had (hey, it'll have even more meaning) and have your jeweler set it into a ring or pendant for you. But now you need to find a jeweler that's willing to use (and knows how to get) recycled metals, huh? Contact Ethical Metalsmiths (ethicalmetalsmiths.org) to find a jeweler near you. Or recycle your old jewelry. If there's a piece you don't wear anymore, have a jeweler melt it down and create something you actually want to wear.

Explore



According to Matheson, fashion forward designers like Loomstate, Edmund and Stewart+Brown are making an effort to use organic cotton in their designs. Using the web and your library's resources, research some of the eco friendly trends in the fashion industry. Beyond the use of organic cotton, what are some of the green strategies fashion houses employ? What environmental strains do these strategies hope to alleviate?

Invent



In her introduction to *Green Chic*, Matheson informs us that she's "not a veteran environmentalist" and that she enjoys "certain creature comforts" such as taking hot showers and having a killer wardrobe. What she's developing with these claims is a particular persona or ethos that allows us to identify with her as an author. Based on the information she tells us about herself, her tone throughout the excerpt, and the stylistic choices she makes in her writing, how would you characterize Matheson's ethos? How does this persona work to persuade us? Does it make you want to listen more carefully to what she has to say or less? Who do you imagine is her target audience?

Compose



Write a short essay in which you compare the authorial persona or ethos of Matheson to that of Colin Beavan, the author of *No Impact Man*, whose excerpt can be found on page 99. In your essay, consider the following questions: What different approaches do the authors take in terms of developing their authorial personae? Why do you think they make these choices? Which author do you take more seriously? Why? Which author do you think is a better advocate for "going green"?