



Fashion would be nothing without the textiles from which it is made. Pressure on designers to hit a standard of proper manufacturing as well as sustainable fabrics and eco-conscious finishing treatments are more and more intense as the entire globe looks at how to help the environment.

The design industry is not going to get a break from the political end of the spectrum. Businesses that refuse to make adjustments will continue to be scrutinized where as those that make manufacturing breakthroughs will prosper.

A fur loving, luxury tote toting, private jet flying editor was over-heard at dinner the other evening asking whether their tablemates scarf was made of organic yarn. And with that the “movement” was proven to be a revolution.

The largest complaints as far as editors and consumers go is how to make eco-friendly garments luxurious in terms of these three things: color, pattern and texture. They feel they do not want to give up their beautiful Bordeaux chiffon and burn-out velvet cocktail frock for the holiday season.

What designers need to remember is that many of the most luxurious fabrics came from the days of Pharaohs and Kings before there was mass production and chemical ease.

It might be easy for a designer to find un-bleached natural cotton... but who wants to use a cream color palette season after season. Chemical dyes are derivatives of a chemistry-lab reaction of coal tar/petroleum ingredients which equals more demand for petroleum needs globally. Halting their use is one step to lessening the world's dependence.

The fashion industry can make a huge impact on that since about 99 percent of the population globally wears some type of clothing. People are aware that dyes with toxic compounds can enter the popular water systems.

These rivers and lakes are what second and third world countries use for bathing, drinking and cooking.

If designers and editors put this information out there the consumers will take the time to make more educated decisions.

“Organic pigment inks utilize phthalate-free components. Its counterpart, plastisol ink is a soft rubber product made from petroleum, and as recent press has highlighted--soft plastics must be removed from infant products due to leaching and proven ill effects on human and animal endocrine systems. By using this printing process the air quality will improve as well as the end product of the clothing,” says Maia Andersen of PROPHETIK.

Patterns become a more complicated issue. A designer with a conscience to do well would have had to show plain colored collections until the past couple of years.

Research and Development teams at the TED project in Chelsea’s college of Art and Design have been dealing with ways to get around the traditional method of screen printing.

“Digital print is considered more 'friendly' as it does use much less water. Here at TED Project, we are the first ones to digitally print onto sustainable base fibers, such as hemp and organic cotton which is really exciting new development,” advises Clara Vuletich, research assistant at TED.

”There is also actually an Australian product called Permaset (www.colormaker.com.au), which is a 100% solvent-free screen printing ink for textiles, which is the only one on the market, It is ideal for textile printers who print their own fabrics,” adds Vuletich.

And then there is the ever present question of texture, but of course a well-rounded research team has answers for that as well. Andersen and her team at PROPHETIK are secretly working on a non-chemical, naturally produced organic burn-out fabric.

Vuletich turns to her colleagues Becky Early and Kate Goldsworthy for the finishing touch.

They have collaborated in a project called 'Twice Upcycled'. Taking a second-hand polyester blouse which is stained and unwanted, Becky overprints it with an eco-friendly exhaust print technique, and then Kate (who is exploring new technologies such as laser welding on re-cycled materials), 're-surfaces' the shirt which gives it a kind of 'sequined' effect, and then they refashion the garment to extend its life. At the moment, it is purely a research project producing one-off garments, but there are plans to scale it up for commercial production.

“Sourcing eco friendly a fabric is a very tricky area, there is so much interest from consumers and designers but the textile manufacturers have not caught up - mainly because it takes so long to research and develop new fabrics! therefore, most young sustainable fashion labels find it very hard to source the fabrics they want. There is no 'one-stop-shop' to sourcing, we basically say you have to get out there and be a great researcher,” says Vuletich.

“The more people that network and share knowledge the better.

That is how sustainability works! Or you can hook up with a young textile designer who is producing one-off bespoke fabrics and do collaboration together!”