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Eco-Fashion: Green is the new black

As socially responsible fashion goes mainstream here's a look at some clothing makers that balance style conscious with social conscience.

By Jessica Seid, CNNMoney.com staff writer

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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- Bye bye Birkenstocks.

More shoppers are realizing that being socially aware doesn't mean sacrificing style.

"The exciting thing is that you no longer need to have a nuts and berries aesthetic to wear eco-friendly clothes," said Kyeann Sayer an industry expert and contributing writer for *TreeHugger* magazine.

On the heels of thriving demand for organic food, consumers are seeking out designers and manufacturers that make clothes from organic and recycled materials - that look good too.

Over the past four years American Apparel made a big splash with a sweatshop-free message and socially responsible business plan.

Recently, CEO Dov Charney expanded the company's environmental policies by launching a new line of organic T-shirts and a program that recycles over a million pounds of fiber scraps annually.

Nearly two years ago, U2 frontman Bono and his wife Ali Hewson, along with designer Rogan Gregory, launched EDUN, an all-organic clothing line.

EDUN, which is nude spelled backwards, says it promotes, encourages and returns social value to local workforces and communities in the developing world, especially Africa.

But CEO Christian Kemp-Griffin insists that the company's first priority is to make beautiful clothing, and the jeans sell well at \$175 a pair at [Saks \(Charts\)](#) and [Nordstrom \(Charts\)](#).

"You get people that buy (EDUN clothing) because they like the way it looks and then other people have read about it in the press and want to support it and they're pleasantly surprised that it looks good," said Kemp-Griffin.

Scott Hahn, the co-founder of the organic denim line Loomstate, said he and his partner Rogan Gregory jumped at the opportunity to cultivate the demand for organic cotton.

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"What we're finding is that when you make the right decision, it might not be the most profitable but in the long-term you will stay in business because that's what the consumer wants to see," Hahn said.

Loomstate's \$55 T-shirts and \$132-\$176 jeans are carried by luxury department store Barneys New York, a division of [Jones Apparel](#) ([Charts](#)), [Urban Outfitters](#) ([Charts](#)) Anthropology stores and eluxury.com.

Hahn believes the company will turn a profit for the first time this year.

Charmoné also launched a collection of heels, pumps, and wedges this fall that is animal-safe, eco-friendly and sweatshop-free. Instead of leather and suede, the shoes are made with microfibers.

The collection uses water-based glues, nickel-free hardware, and the production process is PVC free.

In addition to minimizing the impact of manufacturing, Charmoné, which is a blend of the words charm and harmony, will also donate a portion of its profits to charities that support people, animals and the environment.

So far, "we've gotten a great response," said co-founder Lauren Carroll. Carroll and her partner, Jodi Koskella, have started shopping their line of \$295 to \$325 shoes to high-end retailers such as Nordstrom and Neiman Marcus.

"People no longer fall into neat little categories of 'hippie' or 'yuppie' and the mainstream consumer is becoming more socially aware," Carroll said. "We're offering women an opportunity to make wise, socially conscious fashion choices without sacrificing their sense of style or individuality."

This November, [Levi's](#) ([Charts](#)) will start selling \$150 organic jeans, with \$60 versions planned for 2007. Even [Wal-Mart](#) ([Charts](#)) added [organic cotton T-shirts](#) to this year's back-to-school offerings.

"Five years ago, there were 30 smaller designers doing eco-fashion. Now there are around 300, and larger retail chains are getting interested," model and self-described "eco-style expert" Summer Rayne Oakes told *Grist* magazine.

And it only seems to be becoming more mainstream as the demand for eco-friendly fashion increases.

In the long run, Sayer said "my hope would be that the necessity to label something eco-fashion is eliminated."


"Just as we expect a certain amount of corporate responsibility, we would expect a level of eco-responsibility."

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