



What Not to Wear...Green-Style

By Ginger Burr, AICI, CIP

“I love your jacket! Who’s the designer?” This is a question you probably hear regularly. While the obvious answer is Armani, Eileen Fisher, or perhaps Jones New York (depending on your style and budget), the longer answer is what everyone is talking about these days. Your clothes might bear the designer’s label, but chances are it has traveled much more extensively than imagined to get to your closet.

With increasing concern about global warming, fair trade and animal welfare, consumers’ interest in the behind-the-scenes creation is growing, and the more they learn, the higher their expectations. According to the Italian National Institute for Foreign Trade, 85 percent of consumers would be willing to pay more for clothing produced in an environmentally friendly way and with fair working conditions for operators (www.greenplanet.net) (and H&M, for one, is responding), and the July 13, 2009 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* reported on the growing vegan fashion market in the article, “Critter Friendly Grows Up.” Forget the old clichés. “Green” fashion, in all its variations, is hot!

Within the fashion industry, traditional manufacturing practices (almost without exception) are steeped in animal abuse. For obvious reasons, it has been well hidden, ignored or glossed over...until now. Celebrities such as Alicia Silverstone, Simon Cowell, and Jorga Fox are enlightening the public, and the impact is huge. In addition, awareness is growing dramatically around pesticide use, personal care ingredient safety, and fair trade practices. It is no longer a matter of “out of sight, out of mind.”

As shoppers will attest, however, it is sometimes challenging to keep these well-intentioned goals front and center when shopping. Old habits die hard, and this is no exception. Just as the veal on your plate bears no resemblance to the tiny calf it came from, it is easy to forget or overlook the origin of that designer lambskin jacket or the fact that conventional cotton is heavily laden with pesticides. While the Kathy Lee Gifford scandal brought child labor practices into the open in 1996, how often do we just assume that designers use fair trade practices when we are buying a pair of shoes or a winter coat?

It might not be glamorous to acknowledge the health impact of pesticides on cotton growers in California, realize the drastically reduced life expectancy of leather tannery workers in Bangladesh, or witness the effects of “mulesing” on merino wool sheep in Australia, but awareness is an integral part of our business.

Until recent years, these were all foreign concepts to many of us. In a short period of time, however, the movement has gone from virtually non-existent to a viable force in the fashion industry. In 2005, you might have been hard pressed to find stylish shoes that were not made of

leather, but it was possible. Today, it is a thousand times easier – and for those of you thinking they are all cheap and ugly, those days are long gone!

This is an exciting time in the continually evolving world of fashion. Now is the time to make an impact offering an unprecedented opportunity to educate yourself and your clients on a new level. Every mindful purchase makes a difference, and you will be consistently amazed by the degree of interest your knowledge will generate in these issues. It can be as seemingly insignificant as recommending safer, more eco-friendly nail polish (e.g., www.nomiss.com) to positioning yourself as a “green” image consultant.

Keeping up with fashion trends is part of our business, and this particular movement is more a phenomenon than a trend — it is here to stay.

Do you need resources to get you started? Here are just a few:

<http://www.whiteapricot.com/>

<http://www.safecosmetics.org>

<http://www.ecomii.com/blogs/business/2009/04/20/fair-trade-fashion-marketplace/>

http://www.ecochoices.com/1/cotton_statistics.html

<http://www.panna.org/files/conventionalCotton.dv.html>

<http://www.savethesheep.com/animals.asp>

www.furisdead.com

<http://www.utne.com/blogs/blog.aspx?blogid=26&tag=Bangladesh>

Ginger Burr, AICI CIP, founder of Total Image Consultants, author of *Fashion Secrets Mother Never Taught You*, notable speaker and leader in the field of fashion and style, has built a career as an expert personal image consultant and makeup artist who gently and intuitively helps women communicate who they are through what they wear. Get Ginger’s free wardrobe enhancing report, "What's in Your Closet: 10 Elegant Essentials to Complete Your Wardrobe" at <http://www.totalimageconsultants.com/subscribe.shtml>.