



FASHION

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How Brand ROTE is Challenging Fashion Convention

HEALTH, WELLNESS & THE PURSUIT OF A PERFECT TOXIC-FREE TEE

Maybe it was the time spent in Covid lockdown. Or because I'm getting older. Or even that I fancy myself an outdoorsy, beachy West Coast-type. But I draw a hard line these days around dressing comfortably. I eschew anything that isn't invitingly soft; or that doesn't allow me to move with ease.

But at the same time, I won't completely forgo style. And I increasingly worry about what is in my (and my kids') clothing. All of which is to say: when I find something that fits the bill, I want to spread the word. And today that something is ROTE – my favorite new t-shirt brand.



One Sweet, Unassuming Tee

It was after having clocked in on what must have been the hundredth wear of a t-shirt my husband gave me last November (to support a local parent's new business) that I thought I should hunt down more. But what started as an exploration of who created this soft delight of a t-shirt turned into both a inspiring story of female entrepreneurship, as well as, a deeper tale about what goes into clothing and why we don't ask the same questions about what's in a t-shirt as we do in, say, lipstick or granola bars.

I learned that the same inquiry is required and we should not shy away from demanding answers.

Meet Sara Roter & Nadia Gagnier, Founders of ROTE

Sara and Nadia are not dissimilar to many of the female entrepreneurs I've been lucky enough to meet over the years. They are supremely talented with deep experience and an itch to have more control and a bigger impact than would otherwise be possible when working for 'the man.'

Between the two is an impressive and long list of well-known brands as clients and employers; and a high-level of operational expertise garnered over decades in the fashion industry.

So it's no surprise that over drinks and coffee around day-to-day life, Sara and Nadia slowly began to hatch an idea that played to their collective strengths, passion and experience. Because, as Nadia points out: once you have compared notes with someone likeminded, it's too tempting not to consider how you could make a difference together.

And for Sara and Nadia, that difference was in creating that single 'perfect' (and often elusive) t-shirt. But the ROTE way is a tee fully toxic-free.

What Does 'Clean' Actually Mean?

What most of us don't know (and Sara and Nadia would say they know all too well) is that our clothing is steeped in a long list of chemicals. And possibly more unnerving is how willing we are as consumers to buy into sustainability messaging and 'green' marketing without curiosity. Because, like with anything, the truth is so much more complicated and multi-faceted than a marketing tagline can capture.

For Sara and Nadia the topic of chemicals in clothing and home goods is one they have given significant consideration to over the years.

Sara's passion is also borne of something even more personal: with a long family history of breast cancer she tested positive for the BRCA1 genetic mutation nearly two decades ago and opted to have a prophylactic bilateral mastectomy; and later an oophorectomy and hysterectomy.

So it's no surprise that this proactive powerhouse entrepreneur would dedicate herself to proactive health inquiry. It is also why she became an ambassador to [Bright Pink](#), a breast & ovarian health venture philanthropy fund. Sara's passion for asking questions and educating women is the approach she wants to bring to ROTE.

As Sara rightly says: there is no reason that our consumption of fashion should be any different in approach to the way we purchase beauty products or food. We should know the list of ingredients and be able to make decision based on a brand's full transparency.

Clothing as Wellness

It's clear that what we wear has an impact on our health and wellness. From how it allows us to move and pursue exercise and sport; to addressing issues around skin conditions (e.g., cotton is best for any skin irritation such as psoriasis or eczema). A cool cotton tee can also help menopausal women with hot flashes; and, of course, clothing can also impact our mental health (from providing comfort to jumpstarting one's confidence).

Not wanting toxicity to be transferred from our clothing to skin should be a no-brainer. But it's actually a very hard state to achieve.

Building the Perfect T-Shirt

What surprised Sara and Nadia most on the journey to creation of a hero product was how hard it was to demand better. And while the pandemic posed its own set of hurdles to moving forward, the women found the response to their requests and questions to factories to be disappointing. But it not only did not deter them, it inspired the brand's bold tagline: *It's Time to Come Clean.*™

Absolutely, we encourage our consumers, or potential consumers, to approach our collection (and challenge other brands they shop) as they would do with their food and other wellness products in their lives. You should be able to know if there are toxic chemicals in the garment you are about to put on your body in the same way you would consider ingredients before applying beauty products. Or in the same way you are thoughtful about the food you eat.

The ideal approach would be to combine directives from both the FTC and the FDA and require more information to be included on garment tags. Because right now only a few specifics are required on a garment label. These include: origin of manufacture, brand, fiber content, size and washing instructions.

It's not enough. The chemicals used in the manufacture of an item need to be clearly listed on a label. And this is what we hope to raise more awareness for with consumers.

What feedback have you received?

The best feedback we tend to hear from consumers is... "I never thought about that." In fact, our brand name is all about the process of learning. Because ROTE, of course, means the mechanical or habitual repetition of something to be learned.

Our customers are also often surprised that a tee shirt can be both toxic-free, fashionable and soft. The whole package.



ROTE by definition is "the mechanical or habitual repetition of something to be learned." A reminder of how we learn and why we should remain curious as consumers.

What's Next for ROTE

The first tee shirt from the brand had an unexpected and fitting twist— because when you lead with a 'toxic-free' approach you may be surprised with certain outcomes. In the case of pursuing the 'perfect white tee' Sara and Nadia realized that to add bleach to the no-go list meant that a ROTE white would be a bit creamier and more natural. Ironically, this more natural off-white color is quite beautiful and arguably a better 'white.' Because, let's be honest, if you are like me and at the mercy of kids and a dog, an off-white is a better investment in product longevity.

Another surprise is how soft and durable a cotton free of toxicity and excessive processes can feel. I'm personally not proud to be a card-carrying over-drier, but apartment life with kids calls sometimes for going high on the heat to get the job done. And my t-shirt has been remarkably unaffected: no pills, no warping, no shrinking (although I would not ask Sara & Nadia to endorse such measures!)

Finally, ROTE launched as a B-Corp which is a certification that for-profit companies receive heralding their 'social and environmental performance.' It's a rigorous process to become a B-Corp and proof that ROTE is not messing around.

What's most interesting for me is the perspective I was left with...

If any of us just do one thing for ourselves, our families, the environment we can make a difference. It doesn't have to be exhaustive and overwhelming. You don't need to feel like a hypocrite for chopping and changing on your behavior.

But in asking the right questions we get smarter and make better decisions. And what's good for you, your health and wellness is often also beautiful. And that's a lot of everything packed into this one cute t-shirt.

ROTE has new solid colors joining the original tee soon; and the new ice-dyed collection is now available on the site. FromAtoSHE readers can stock up with a 20% discount (code: ATS20).

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