

ANGEL CHANG

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angelchang.com

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PODCAST

By Angel Chang

CONTACT

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Did you know we must radically cut our carbon emissions by half in 10 years (by 2030) or face even more brutal climate change in the future?

ANGEL CHANG is a zero carbon womenswear line handmade by indigenous mountains tribes in rural China according to ancient techniques that follow the cycles of nature.

We use traditional craftsmanship to create clean clothing for a carbon free future.

ABOUT THE DESIGNER

Angel Chang is an American womenswear designer who has been working with ethnic minority artisans in southwest rural China for the last nine years. She began her career designing for Donna Karan Collection in New York and Chloé (See by Chloé) in Paris.

Her first eponymous label (2006 – 2008) incorporated smart textiles into hi-tech garments and received several accolades including the Ecco Domani Fashion Foundation Award and the Cartier Women's Initiative Award.

Disillusioned by technology's unfulfilled promise for innovative textiles, Angel sought to understand the future of clothing better by studying the ancient past.

Since 2010, Angel has worked closely with ethnic minority fabric masters in the rural mountain villages of Guizhou province, China. Following in the footsteps of her ancestors going back 14 generations, she rediscovered her ancestral roots and the plant dyes used in traditional Chinese medicine.

The ANGELCHANG collection was created to bring global appreciation for indigenous craftsmanship and revive traditional fabric-making practices in need of urgent safeguarding.

Angel became the first recipient of Pernod Ricard China's Le Cercle Fund, an artist award for social responsibility to support the preservation of traditional craftsmanship in China.



The designer Angel Chang picking cotton with a Miao minority village farmer

As a TED Resident and Smithsonian Artist, Angel speaks to global audiences about fashion, sustainability, and indigenous knowledge. As a NEST Professional Fellow and Member of the Artisan Alliance, she provides design expertise to artisan groups around the world.

She received an MA in Modern Art from Columbia University, and BA cum laude in Art History & Visual Arts from Barnard College in New York City.

Original Button-Down
Natural
\$840

Biasha Palazzo Pant
Natural
\$805



THE BEGINNING

Have you ever loved an object so much that the thought of losing it forever was too painful to bear?

In 2011, I moved from New York City to a tiny remote mountain village in Guizhou province, home to the Miao and Dong ethnic minority tribes. I was obsessed with their beautiful traditional costumes that were displayed in museums around the world.

For thousands of years, their ancient techniques and recipes were passed down from mother to daughter. But now, China's rapid speed towards modernization would soon destroy their fabric-making tradition forever. The grandmothers were the last generation of their people to bear the knowledge of this ancient craft.

My dream was to create a womenswear collection that would bring their traditional craftsmanship to the international market and keep their tradition from disappearing. They to keep it from disappearing. Selling the collection would bring much-needed jobs into the rural villages, the poorest in China, while inspiring the younger generation to continue the craft.

But once we finished, I realized we had created something even more astonishing. By following their traditional techniques, the result was a truly environmentally sustainable collection!

No electricity. No chemicals. No fossil fuels.
Zero carbon.

Over the 9 year journey, I discovered that indigenous knowledge could help us find more sustainable ways of making clothing today. These are the lessons I learned...

Angel Chang

TIMELINE OF A SEED-TO-CLOSET GARMENT

JANUARY	Waiting for spring
FEBRUARY	Waiting for spring
MARCH	Germinate cotton seeds
APRIL	Plant cotton seeds Raise silk worms
MAY	Grow cotton Feed silk worms
JUNE	Grow cotton Feed silk worms
JULY	Grow cotton Boil silk cocoons
AUGUST	Harvest cotton bolls Spin cotton into yarn Spin silk into yarn
SEPTEMBER	Set-up yarn on handloom Weave fabric Harvest indigo leaves Create indigo dye vat Collect red soil
OCTOBER	Weave fabric Wash and cook fabric Dye fabric in indigo dye Dye fabric with red soil Beat fabric
NOVEMBER	Cut & sew clothes Make hand-knot buttons Embroider labels
DECEMBER	Garment finished



Homegrown

Handspun

Handwoven

Hand dyed

Hand knotted

Hand embroidered

Handsewn

How an ANGEL CHANG shirt compares with the average t-shirt:

Carbon footprint (cradle to gate):

ANGEL CHANG shirt = 0.4 kg of CO₂e

Average cotton t-shirt = 2.1 kg of CO₂e

Avg polyester t-shirt = 5.5 kg of CO₂e

Electricity used:

ANGEL CHANG shirt = none

Average cotton t-shirt = 1.808kWh

Chemical pesticides used:

ANGEL CHANG shirt = none

Average cotton t-shirt = 0.3 lbs

Water used:

ANGEL CHANG shirt = 12 liters + rainfall

Average cotton t-shirt = 2700 liters

Traveled around the world (cradle to gate):

ANGEL CHANG shirt = 30 miles

Average cotton t-shirt = 4500 mile

GROWING COTTON

We use local native-seed cotton that is grown on small family farms from April to August in Guizhou. Each family uses 1 mu (0.165 acres) of land to grow everything they need to eat and survive. Cotton is rotated with other vegetables planted throughout the year.



“Seed is not just the source of life.
It is the very foundation of our being.”

Vandana Shiva

The farmers use naturally organic farming practices. They do not use pesticides on their own crops because the chemical residue left on the vegetables hurts their stomachs when ingested.

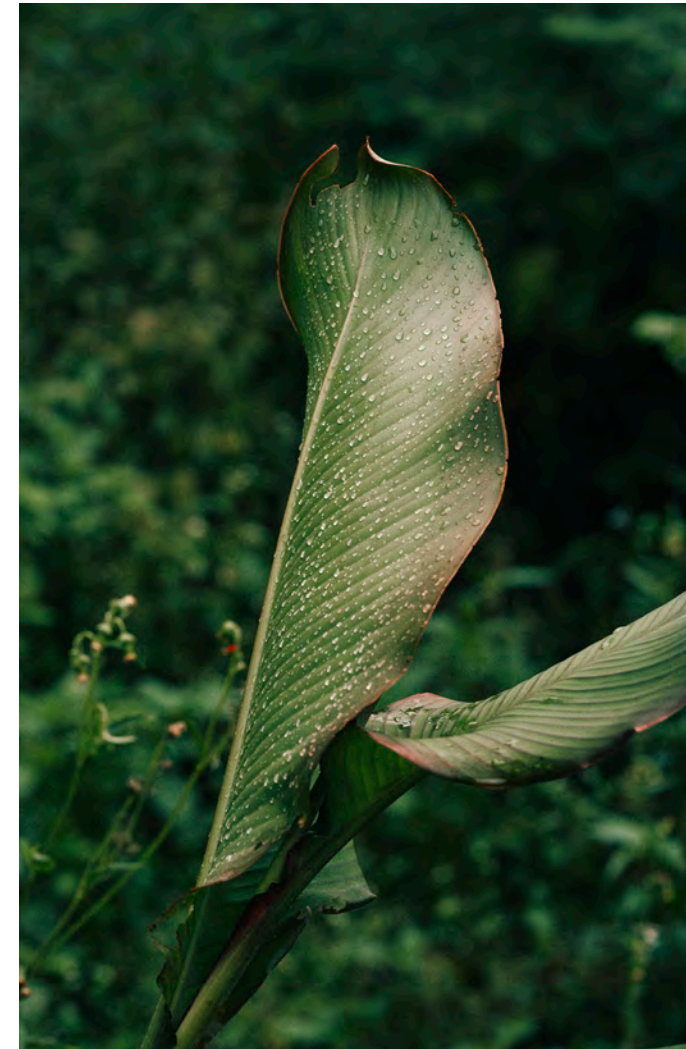


My Favorite Shirt
Natural
\$955



3 INGREDIENTS

Plants
Sun
Mountain water



All the materials used to create our collection comes directly from the ground or the surrounding forest. Natural fibers are thermoregulating and allow the skin to breathe.

Wearing the soft handwoven cotton on your skin feels like being wrapped in nature all day. The calming feeling is like gazing at a plant or touching a tree. The clean fiber on your skin will make your mind feel grounded and at ease.

LESSON 1: FORGET EVERYTHING I KNOW

When I moved to the mountains in 2012, the first thing I had to do was forget everything I had been trained to do as a fashion designer in New York.

What made life so efficient in the city did not apply in the mountains. Producing fabric in any color at any time of year was not possible in nature. There were no sewing supply stores and ordering anything online took 3 weeks to arrive.

We would have to be self-sufficient and make everything with our own bare hands.

I had to unlearn everything I knew about and let nature become my teacher.



My Favorite Shirt
Natural
\$955

The call of the spinning wheel is the noblest of all.
Because it is the call of love. And love is Swaraj.

Mahatma Gandhi



My dream was to produce clothing entirely handmade from scratch like humans have done throughout history -- until 150 years ago.

In order to do this, I would have to hand-spin the yarn, a tradition that is disappearing around the world. It took me 3 years to find grandmothers who still had the knowledge to spin cotton by hand.



A Buyi minority grandmother teaching me
how to hand-spin native-seed cotton

Only native-seed cotton can be hand-spun into yarn.

While genetically-modified (GMO) cotton makes up 99.4% of global cotton production, it has only existed for the last 25 years.

Organic cotton, on the other hand, makes up 0.6% of cotton production yet consumes 46% fewer greenhouse gas emission, reduces water pollution by 98%, and uses 91% less water than GMO cotton. It is how we always grew cotton in the past.

By using native-seed organic cotton, we are supporting a long chain of sustainable practices that are healthier for farmers and the planet.

LESSON 2: MAN-MADE VS. REAL TIME

The ancient Greeks had two words for time: “kronos” and “kairos”. Kronos is the structured time of clocks and calendars. Kairos is spiritual time that cannot be controlled or organized.

Our lives today are dominated by kronos, or what I refer to as man-made time. We schedule our days according to the hours and minutes of a mechanical clock.

Electricity and light bulbs have allowed us to alter nature’s clock - making us less reliant on the sun and climate to dictate our sense of time. We no longer wake up at sunrise, follow the cycles of the moon, or eat our food in-season.

Building our lives and cities around this artificial sense of time has shifted our circadian rhythm and internal imbalance with nature.

We need to allow our bodies to synchronize back with nature’s timing, and reconnect with kairos -- what I now call real time.



Our wooden workshop surrounded
by terraced rice patties.



LESSON 3: FOLLOW NATURE'S TIMING

Living in the mountains requires slowing down our internal concept of time. Patience is required in adjusting our mind and body to the pace of nature.

We can observe how silk worms are raised between April and June when the leaves of mulberry trees are available to feed to the worms. In May, the fresh fallen petals of buddleia flowers can be gathered from the forest floor to create a soft yellow dye.

Rushing the process and foraging out of season is not only difficult for us, it also causes stress on the local environment -- like nature's way of telling us to slow down.

We see this environmental stress at the macro level with the fashion industry's demand for fast production. Nature cannot break down toxic wastewater at the same rate it is being dumped into rivers and oceans.

We must follow nature's timing and only produce at the rate that the environment can recycle or decompose of the waste.



Each piece is handmade from scratch. Even the buttons and button holes are created by hand using plants we grow or gather from the land.



“That thin air had a dream-like texture, matching the porcelain-blue of the sky; with envy breath and every glance he took in a deep anaesthetising tranquility...”

James Hilton
Lost Horizon

Original Button-Down
Natural
\$840

Biasha Palazzo Pant
Natural
\$805



“Everyone admits that whatever may be the future of the mill industry, the handloom ought not be allowed to perish.”

Mahatma Gandhi

LESSON 4: ELECTRICITY

Our village of Tang’an has only had electricity since 1994.

The villagers continue to lead a traditional agrarian lifestyle that is powered by sunlight, firewood, water buffalo, and their own hands.

When the electricity stops for several days following a rainstorm, life can continue as normal for the villagers.

This is why my collection is made without electricity.

I realized how dependent we Americans are on electric power source run by fossil fuels. Electricity has only been around for the last 150 years, but is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities in the United States.

There are many ways we can adjust our lives to use less electricity inside our own homes and businesses.

Our ancestors were able to live and thrive without it, so we can too!

A Dong minority
grandmother weaving
our fabric

Our handwoven fabric washed in mountain water and drying in the sun.



“...he felt the invasion of a deep spiritual emotion, as if Shangri-La were indeed a living essence, distilled from the magic of the ages and miraculously preserved against time.”

James Hilton, Lost Horizon

Red soil outside our workshop is collected to dye our color Clay. Wearing the color makes one feel grounded with the energy of the earth.

In the village, clothing is worn, reworn, passed down, mended, or overdyed to extend its life.



After 10 years of wearing, it will be sewn into a blanket or used as rugs. The fabric continues to be reused and upcycled.

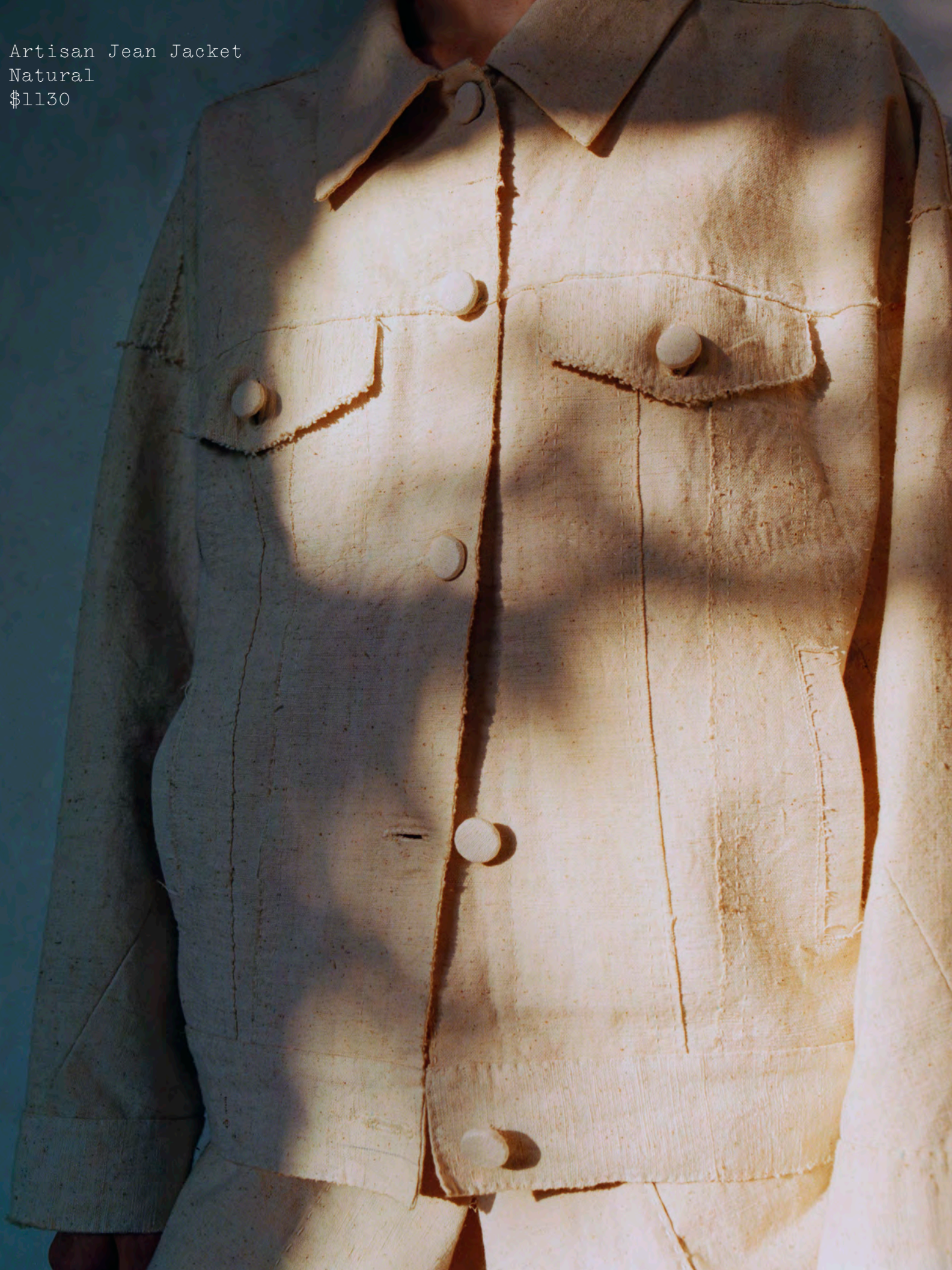
Because it's made of all natural fibre, it can be discarded in the forest and decompose back into the earth.

Anti T-Shirt
Clay
\$440

Biasha Palazzo Pants
Natural
\$805



Artisan Jean Jacket
Natural
\$1130



LESSON 5: SLOW CAN BE STRONG

For one week, I kept tabs on a spider making a web outside my window sill. Watching it drag one small strand at a time was so slow; it felt painful for me to watch. It seemed like so much effort for something I could easily wipe away in an instant.

One night, there was a powerful thunderstorm that knocked out the electricity in the village, blew the shingles off my roof, and dumped rainwater all over my bedroom floor. Fallen tree branches were strewn all over the property grounds.

So I was surprised to find my spider's web unharmed the next morning. It managed to survive the storm perfectly intact.

When I looked beyond the window sill and out onto our tea farm, I noticed that all the bushes were covered with spider webs. The raindrops hanging from them glistened in the sun like chandeliers. They had all survived the storm.

That day I learned that slow production can also mean strength, tenacity, and longevity. The spider web showed me that slow can be strong.

After harvest season in November, the loud sounds of pounding fabric on stone can be heard echoing throughout Miao and Dong villages across Guizhou province.



Grandmothers beat the fabric with wooden mallets to soften the fibers like tenderizing meat, and press the dye crystals into the fabric.

Kurta Shirt Dress
Clay
\$1175





LESSON 6: NATURE AGES GRACEFULLY

Nothing is disposable in nature.

Things may change form or purpose, but their role is never less important than how they were used last.

Plant-dyed textiles develop an aged patina that becomes more beautiful over time. By contrast, man-made items look worn and old after being used; they lose value and aesthetic appeal the more they are used.

When something is crafted directly from nature, it can age gracefully like a fine wine.

Anti T-Shirt
Gardenia
\$440

Biasha Palazzo Pants
Gardenia
\$840

Nature does not hurry, yet
everything is accomplished.

Lao Tzu



In August, gardenia pods are foraged from the mountain forest to create a vibrant yellow dye.

This is the fruit of the *Gardenia jasminoides*, a frequently used herb in traditional Chinese medicine that is indigenous to southern China.

It is a central herb for dispelling dampness and heat in the body, and cools the blood. It can be applied topically for burns, reduces eczema on the face and neck, and relieve jaundice.



“If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden.”

Frances Hodson Burnett
The Secret Garden



Meditation Dress
Gardenia
\$785

Original Button-Down
Light Indigo
\$865



LESSON 7: PRODUCE LESS

We need to produce less stuff.

When COVID-19 halted factory production across China for 2 months, satellite images from space showed reduced pollution in the sky. Global carbon emissions also dropped significantly. This is the power of producing less.

In the mountains, growing and making everything one needs to survive is a time-consuming endeavor. Vegetables take 4 months. Clothes take 6 months. Raising pigs take 2 years. Growing trees to build a house takes at least 7 years.

After all that time and effort invested, you would not want to throw it away after just one use. Rather, you would try to make it last, fix it when it's broken, and use it for as long as possible.

You would make just enough for what you need, thereby conserving both your energy and nature's resources at the same time.

Common name:
Assam indigo

Scientific name:
Strobilanthes cusia



Our handwoven fabric is dyed using natural indigo leaves (*Strobilanthes cusia*) that grows wild in Guizhou province. We follow the same technique that has been practiced in China for thousands of years.

The Miao believe indigo has a soul and protects those that wear it -- a farmer, a child, or even a house.



Rural farmers wear indigo-dyed fabrics because it cools the skin and naturally repels mosquitos -- perfect for working under the sun in the humid rice patties.

As a natural antiseptic, indigo is used to heal skin rashes and dress wounds to aid in their healing.

LESSON 8: CONSUME LESS

Buying less stuff is the fastest, cheapest, and easiest solution to reducing fashion pollution. But fashion brands do not tell you this.

Instead, they greenwash with stories about their sustainability efforts and biodegradable materials to convince you to buy even more. This ends up polluting more because everything that is purchased eventually ends up in a landfill.

Americans now own 3x as much clothing as their parents had, most of which is not even worn. Each person throws out on average 81 lbs. of clothing each year, which means that one garbage truckful goes to landfill every second!

We all need to stop consuming so much and think consciously about what we purchase.

We can begin by following 3 simple rules:

1. Buy only what you love.
2. Buy higher quality so it lasts longer.
3. Wear it every day like a uniform.

When we buy less, big brands will respond by producing less and this will lead to less fashion pollution. We can be part of the solution by voting with our wallets.

Original Button-Down
Light Indigo
\$865

Biasha Palazzo Pant
Light Indigo
\$840



Farmer couture. Folk couture. Peasant couture.
Nature couture. Ancient couture.

Each piece is cut and sewn entirely by hand
like haute couture, but made from raw plant
materials grown on the land or foraged from
the surrounding mountain forest

No sewing machines are used in the process.



A jacket takes 10 days to sew by hand. A
dress takes 6 days. A pair of pants takes 4
days. Each piece is uniquely handstitched by
an artisan, and no two are exactly alike.

By contrast, jeans at a fashion factory take 18 minutes to sew on a sewing machine. It's no wonder we treat them as disposable objects. They lack soul, and we dispose of them as quickly as they are made.

“The clearest way into the universe
is through a forest wilderness.”

John Muir

Anti T-Shirt
Dark Indigo
\$470

Water Master Pants
Dark Indigo
\$845



LESSON 9: CRAFTSMANSHIP & THE HAND

Craftsmanship and the ability to use tools with our hands is what separates us from other animals in the forest.

It is human for us to want to make things with our own hands. That's why we find it so relaxing and satisfying. It is returning to our true human nature.

Over time, we have forgotten the skills needed to make things with our hands. So as consumers, we are disconnected from the things we buy. Since we did not make it ourselves or know the maker, the object has no meaning for us. So we throw it away with no remorse. The result is a disposable culture.

Let's learn to make things again.

The most powerful thing we can do as humans is to re-learn these survival skills make things with our own hands. When we make something ourselves, we appreciate it, use it everyday, re-use it, and are less likely to throw it away immediately.

I truly believe that hand craftsmanship is the antidote to a disposable culture.

Each stitch is sewn as a hand-embroidery.



One can tell the mood of the artisan that day by the tension of the yarns on the fabric or the tightness of the stitch on the cloth.

If she has strong hands, the stitch will be tight. If she is relaxed, the stitch will be looser. The personality of the artisan is revealed on the cloth.

Anti T-Shirt
Dark Indigo
\$470

Water Master Pants
Dark Indigo
\$845





LESSON 10:

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE = SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Knowledge is quickly disappearing and time is running out. Of the 7000 languages spoken today, only half of them are being passed down to the next generation - and with it the accumulation of knowledge humans have amassed on how to live on this planet for tens of thousands of years.

Our disconnect with nature has led to global climate change, widespread pollution, and the threat of 1 million species facing extinction.

The planet has responded with hurricanes, floods, forest fires, and now a global pandemic -- like a stern warning that nature can wipe us out in an instant if we don't change our ways.

Indigenous knowledge can remind us how to live harmoniously with nature. Reviving this connection with nature will be key to solving climate change and our future survival.



Meditation Dress / Natural \$755



Farmer Top w/ Cording / Natural \$525
Biasha Palazzo Pant / Natural \$805



My Favorite Shirt / Gardenia \$985



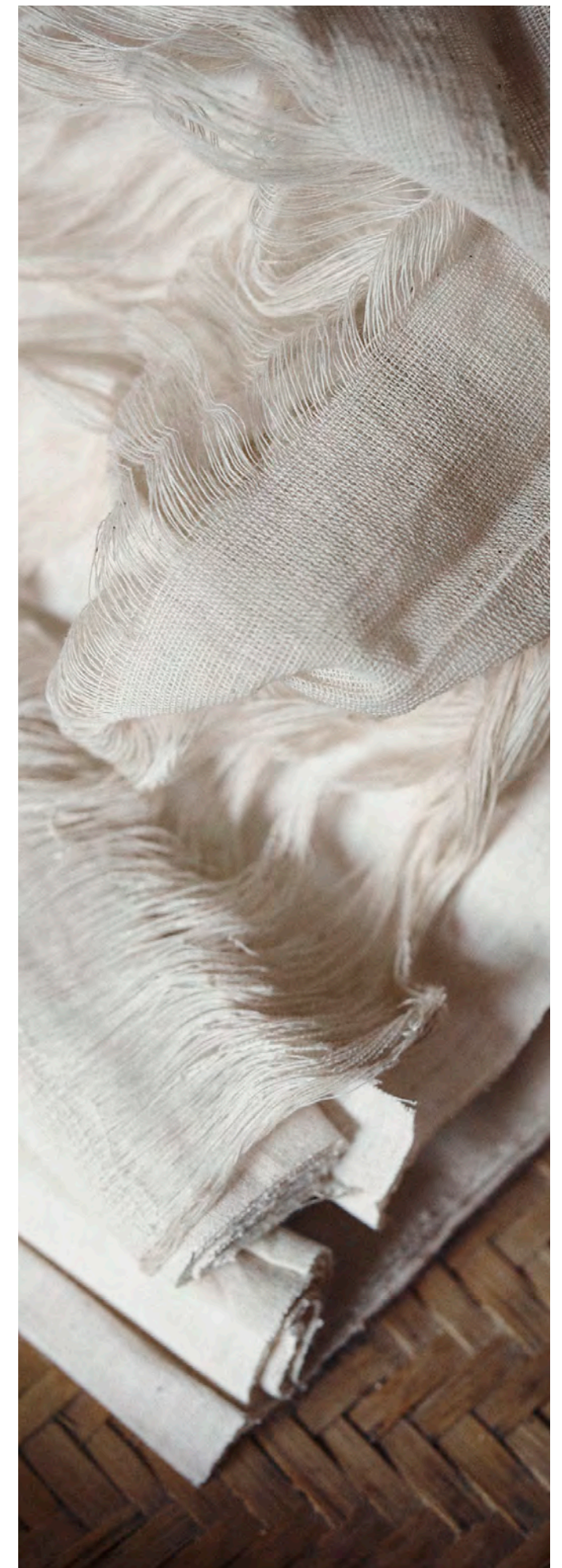
Original Button-Down / Clay \$865
Water Master Pants / Natural \$740



Grandmother Jacket / Natural \$1130
Biasha Palazzo Pant / Natural \$805



Artisan Jean jacket / Natural \$1130
Biasha Palazzo Pant / Natural \$805





Farmer Jacket Dk Indigo \$1130



My Favorite Shirt / Lt Indigo \$985



Meditation Dress / Lt Indigo \$785



Anti T-Shirt / Lt Indigo \$440
Water Master Pants / Lt Indigo \$770



Meditation Dress / Dk Indigo \$850




Kurta Shirt Dress / Dk Indigo \$1250



Handwoven Jumpsuit / Dk Indigo \$1695



Handwoven Robe / Dk Indigo \$1395
Biasha Palazzo Pant / Dk Indigo \$910



“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately,
to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I
could learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came
to die, discover that I had not lived.”

Henry David Thoreau
Walden

CREDITS

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Makeup: Caolifhionn Gifford (Streeters)

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Maggie Duncan (Society)

Jewelry: Soko

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Non-profit partner: Tang'an Dong Ethnic Eco-Museum
Guizhou, China

