

the goodies

Ashley Hilton is a Nelson-based jeweller who uses metals mined in ethical, eco-friendly ways

On a scale of one to 10, with one being George Bush and 10 being Nandor Tanczos, where do you sit? I'd like to put myself about seven. I take it pretty seriously.

What do you do that you're ashamed of? I drive a lot, and I still haven't bought a bike, which I'm pretty ashamed of. I only live five minutes' ride from town.

What about global warming? Are humans responsible or was it going to happen anyway? I think it's pretty much indisputable now that it's a human problem.

What's the green issue closest to your heart? Jewellery aside, it's the big dam that's proposed on the Mokonui [Gorge].

Do you compost? Yeah. I've got a compost. And a vege garden. And chickens.

What about the last time you caught a bus? I haven't caught a bus since I lived in Wellington, which was about a year ago.

Were your underpants made in China? I go commando, I'm afraid! Though I'm ashamed to say I'm wearing a pair of jeans I bought at Old Navy when I was in the States – so I have no doubt they were made in China.

Now we've established your green credentials, tell us about your jewellery. My main range that's going really well is etched. I make up quite simple rings, earrings or brooches – very simple rectangles – and carve out the designs with a little chisel. I call it etching, but it's carving really.

And you've started using what you call ethical metals? My dad works now and then with this eccentric guy on the West Coast who has a small alluvial gold plant. He takes a big vacuum cleaner and sucks up sand off the beach down in Charleston and runs it over mats and collects the fine gold. It's a bit



more work – you've got to melt it down and mix in some copper to give it strength – but it's something I enjoy. I've had a few commissions with ethical gold. I still use a lot of regular materials. I'm getting about 75 percent of my silver from recycled sources, but 25 percent is straight out of the ground.

So what's wrong with regular gold? Well, a lot of what I've learned is from the No Dirty Gold campaign. And they're talking about these really large strip mines in the Americas where they pour chemicals into the ground, including a lot of arsenic and cyanide, and leach the gold out that way.

That's part of it. The other part is the large international mining companies that are going into South American countries and displacing indigenous people. They are being moved off their land and they are not getting any royalties. It's similar to what happens in the coffee industry.

There's not a 100 percent alternative at the moment – but every little bit of pressure you can put on your suppliers helps. I said to my suppliers, "I know a percentage of your silver is recycled – and that percentage, can I buy that?" And, according to them, I was the first person who had asked.

Do people ask for ethical metals for wedding rings because they're symbolic? I'd like to think so. But I haven't had as big a take-up on the ethical gold as I'd hoped for. I thought it was something people would be really interested in – but some people just aren't at all. INTERVIEW WITH GREG ROUGHAN

'Fleurs Place is everything I hoped it would be'. Rick Stein

simple, fresh, naturally good food

