



You say
potato,
I say
sustainable

WARDROBE: NICOLE KEEN.

Living more sustainably involves evaluating all aspects of your life, including your personal style. Shocking but true: The fashion industry is responsible for an estimated 10 percent of the world's carbon emissions and is the second largest global polluter of water. It's obvious there's room for improvement, but at the same time, we can't deny the ego-boosting power of a cute outfit. Here are 10 ways to update your wardrobe in a more thoughtful, eco-friendly fashion

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1 Read your labels

Many fabrics have massive environmental footprints. Synthetic fibres such as polyester, for example, can take decades to decompose in a landfill. Sustainably grown bamboo, on the other hand, requires no chemicals or fertilizers and very little water to produce (look for a certification from the Forest Stewardship Council). "Natural fibres are biodegradable," explains Katie Kolodinski, founder of Silk Laundry, which produces essentials like camisoles and blouses made of silk, available online and at its namesake store in Montreal. Finally, look for items made of recycled materials; as part of its Conscious Collection, H&M has incorporated innovations including recycled cotton made from textile remnants and post-consumer textile waste.

2 Do your research

Look for brands that practise ethical manufacturing, meaning that all points of production are safe, efficient and take into account the well-being of workers. For a great example, consider Poppy Barley, an Edmonton-based footwear brand. It produces its chic ankle boots and flats at small factories in Mexico and Brazil, and has developed its own factory-screening rubric based on International Labour Organization standards. (Workweeks never exceed 48 hours, workers are paid a living wage and there's no forced or child labour.) The company also ensures its manufacturing facilities are structurally sound, with fire exits and access to clean drinking water. "Our two factories in Mexico always tell us we are helping to create well-paying jobs where people feel valued," says co-founder Justine Barber.

3 Shop local

Buying locally made clothing has unique advantages. Just ask Ashley Freeborn, co-founder of Smash + Tess. With ethical production facilities located in its home base of Vancouver,

Smash + Tess can produce the precise quantity and sizing of its signature rompers and lounge-wear that customers have asked for, virtually eliminating overstock. "It really does ensure that we're not being wasteful," she says.

One common mental barrier to shopping made-in-Canada fashion is the idea that it's prohibitively expensive, which is something Victoire Boutique owners Régine Paquette and Katie Frappier say is not the case. Their Ottawa shop stocks more than 80 Canadian labels, with most items priced at \$250 or less. "Cost per wear is important," Paquette says. While a well-made item may cost slightly more than its fast-fashion counterpart upfront, it's likely to last much longer. "It really comes down to value."

4 Look for retailers that are reducing their environmental footprints

From packaging to shipping materials and energy consumption, there can be a lot of waste going on behind the scenes at your favourite store. Some, like Simons, are making smart changes. At its Galeries de la Capitale store in Quebec City, Simons introduced high-efficiency LED light fixtures and a geothermal heating and cooling system, as well as solar panels. "They are a great visual cue, signalling sustainability efforts while also demonstrating that renewable technology can be beautiful," says Angela Stinson, director of store development. Companies that are Certified B Corporations, meanwhile, meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, such as having clear, specific environmental goals. In Canada, that list includes Encircled and Kotn.

5 Embrace thrifting

If you're new to the thrifting scene, start small, says stylist Nicole Manek. "When you're vintage shopping, every single piece needs to be looked at and assessed. It's a lot of neurological

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work, so just go for an hour the first time,” she says. Manek—who runs Life of Manek, an online shop that sells her vintage finds—has been thrifting her entire life and incorporates vintage pieces in her current work as a costume designer on productions like CBC’s *Baroness von Sketch Show*. She also recommends keeping a running list of the items you’re on the hunt for—say, a 1980s band shirt or that perfect leopard coat. And don’t feel pressured to find everything right away. “I have an overarching list of vintage things I want, but I give myself years to obtain them,” she says.

6 Rent, don’t buy

Clothing rental services are popping up across Canada, including Rent Frock Repeat, FlauntBox and Dresst. Stmnt, a London, Ont.-based company, facilitates the logistics of clothing rentals for other brands and stores, particularly when they have pieces left over at the end of the season. “Our main goal was to decrease the demand for fast fashion as well as the amount of wasted clothing items,” says Jenessa Olson, Stmnt’s co-founder. Not only does renting extend the life of a garment, it also allows you to experiment with your style. “Last year, I rented a red plaid pantsuit for Christmas Day,” Olson says. “This was very out-of-the-box for me. I would never have bought it, but the look was awesome.”

7 Repair or alter when you can

Properly caring for your clothes can go a long way to extending their lifespan, and that includes repairs and alterations. At Sole Survivor in Toronto, owner and head cobbler Lorena Agolli goes beyond traditional repairs to complete customization, including transforming styles—such as cutting motorcycle boots down to Chelsea boots or changing a toe shape from pointy to square. “We can really give clients back their footwear that they love but with a completely different look,” she says. She also likes to educate her clients on investing in well-made footwear out of the gate, which she says can extend wear by as much as 10 years.

We’ve all been faced with a full closet and the feeling of nothing to wear, but that’s something Megan Kinney, who owns the New York-based clothing brand Meg, says can be solved with alterations. “Ask yourself what it is about a piece that’s making you not wear it,” Kinney says. At all Meg locations, including its Toronto shop, she encourages customers who have Meg clothing in need of alterations to book a consultation with an in-store stylist who can suggest (and facilitate) ways to reimagine the item. She says minor adjustments or full-fledged transformations, like cutting off sleeves or turning a dress into



Better buys

Five earth-friendlier items to consider for spring



Poppy Barley’s Market Mule in Snake is produced in a carefully vetted factory. \$215, poppybarley.com.



Clothes made from natural fibres, like this Silk Laundry Bias Cut Cami, are biodegradable. \$150, silklaundry.ca.



Thief & Bandit’s Bralette and Undies, are made from organic cotton. \$66 and \$59, victoireboutique.com.



Frank and Oak’s Drift Sneaker features a slew of eco-innovations. \$169, frankandoak.com.



The dress from H&M’s Conscious Exclusive Collection, uses some recycled textiles. \$169, hm.com.

a coat, can often give an item a second life. (Bear in mind that taking something in is generally easier than letting it out, and major alterations can be pricey.)

8 Start a clothing swap

Toronto-based friends Amanda Barker and Dale Boyer have been holding swaps since 2001 (their experiences even inspired them to write an interactive play called *Clotheswap*). Their number one piece of advice for would-be swappers is to invite a wide range of guests—regardless of size or gender presentation. “That’ll diversify the garments, it will diversify the conversation and you’ll get to know some new people,” Barker says. Clothing-wise, ask guests to bring any number of items and styles that are clean (minimal pet fur!) and in good condition, then arrange them by category. They also suggest donating any unclaimed clothing to an organization like Dress for Success. Swapping can also shift your perspective on shopping. “Once you have a swapping mentality, things come into your life and things go. I don’t look at them with a price tag like I used to,” says Boyer.

9 Shop or sell through consignment

Shopping at consignment stores is a closed-loop system, says Britt Rawlinson, owner of Toronto-based VSP Consignment. “If consignors are dropping off their pieces while also buying resale, there’s no need for new products to be created.” She recommends checking with your local shop to find out what they are accepting and when, and also visiting in person for the best selection. When selling, consignors will receive a percentage of the final sale amount (at VSP, it’s 50 percent), which may be paid by cheque or in-store credit.

10 Dispose of unwearable items properly

The average Canadian throws away an estimated 37 kg of textiles each year, contributing to the 12 million tons of textiles sent to North American landfills annually. To properly dispose of your clothing at the end of its life cycle, donate to organizations where clothing is needed or at collection bins in stores like H&M. Also research your city’s disposal plan for textiles. The City of Markham, Ont., for example, has a collection of more than 200 bins for residents to drop off old fabric items to be donated to partners for reuse. Items that can’t be re-worn are turned into industrial rags, furniture padding, insulation and more. Colchester County, N.S., offers curbside pickup of textiles to divert them from landfill. Are the options in your hometown limited? Contact your local government and tell them you want access to better textile-recycling services. **C**