

“Consumers, once aware of their impact, will slowly but surely shift toward mindful choices.”

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## In conversation with Reistor

Reistor intends to inspire consumers to make ‘ethical consumption of fashion’ a part of their everyday life. They describe themselves as “minimalistic fashion that is timeless and transformative, without diluting our social and environmental responsibility”. They focus on reducing environmental impact (REI) by using sustainable fabrics like hemp, biodegradable trims and home compostable packaging. We got to talk

with Harjas and Mehma Singh about the state of sustainability in Indian fashion.

## **Q. How long has Reistor been around for? And how do you perceive the industry to have changed since you first started?**

A. We launched on March 16th 2021. Reistor was conceptualised in 2020 while in lockdown. It's truly been a journey of labour and love. In the couple of weeks that we have been online we have seen a fair amount of organic traction. As fourth generation fashion and textile entrepreneurs (Mehma and I are siblings and co-founders) over the years we have witnessed the evolution in the industry firsthand. Our family has been in the textile trade for about seven decades—for us it is almost as though, through Reistor, things are coming full circle. Our great grandparents were cotton and silk traders and slowly moved from natural to synthetic materials as trends changed and polyester gained popularity (in the '80s). Now we are back to where the family started with an emphasis on natural, sustainably-sourced raw materials.

## **Q. What are the main problems you see in the fashion sector today vis-a-vis sustainability?**

A. For us, the biggest challenge is the lack of awareness amongst consumers and the constant greenwashing by some fashion brands. Although conversations around sustainability have started, there is still a lot of educating to do and awareness that needs to be created. The goal to educate consumers is also hindered by the excessive amounts of greenwashing that exists. For example, most consumers are shocked when they learn how much water goes into producing a single cotton t-shirt! We have spent a great deal of time educating ourselves and have used that to help drive our decisions. We chose hemp for our debut collection since (amongst its many other benefits) it uses 92% less water than conventional cotton would to process (based on LCA by a third party). We are trying to do our bit by sharing these insights with our customers so that they can better understand the impact of their purchases.

## **Q. Given that many brands are now being accused of greenwashing, how are the more conscious brands like**

## yours implementing change within the sector?

A. Change is a slow process. Educating our customer on mindful fashion is the first step towards building a case for a shift in consumption patterns. On our website, we have product-wise comparative metrics between hemp vs cotton to highlight and educate our customer. Our social media handles also speak about our impact regularly.

## Q. How do you inspire your customers to continue to invest in sustainable wear?

A. No fashion production is 100% sustainable. All production has carbon and water consumption involved. We are working toward building an ecosystem where we are getting the customer involved by highlighting impact and showing our customer their impact through offsetting our carbon footprint. After making a purchase, our customer gets an email with a certificate and details of the impact of their purchase. We fund three different greenfield projects within India to help with the off-set. Our net carbon neutral offering encourages our customers to make a mindful choice. We also believe in a more holistic approach to sustainability. As part of our mission to be sustainable, not only are we focused on the raw materials we use but also on how our garments are produced. We believe in helping create sustainable livelihoods for our team as well as paying fair wages. We have partnered with an NGO in Mumbai, where we have provided them with sewing machines as well as hired trainers who then worked with our team that consists of women from underserved communities in Mumbai. One in two garments is produced at such centers. Sharing our story and the impact is key for people to be more willing to invest in sustainable wear.

## **Q. Which brands would you recommend in India to imbibe the truest form of sustainability?**

A. There are a few brands that are truly focused on mindful fashion—some brands that began this conversation earlier on are No Nasties, Doodlage to name a few.

## **Q. How can we as consumers drive more pressure for sustainability in fashion?**

A. Consumers, once aware of their impact, will slowly but surely shift toward mindful choices. It's a slow process and this current pandemic has made consumers much more aware and conscious of their choices. Progress is at snail speed, but it's definitely happening and people are now starting to question more and be more mindful of their consumption habits.

## Q. And lastly, how do you envision the sector evolving? Are you hopeful?

A. We are confident that we will get our message out there—it will take some time, but it will definitely happen. Honestly, we have made this decision to transition the way we do business now. But in the next decade or so, all fashion brands will be forced to move in this direction and be more transparent about their production processes. There is no way our plant can sustain this level of pollution from the textile industry.

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