





ELIZABETH

Making compassion for animals her business OLSEN

THRIVE Magazine: What got you into fashion?

Elizabeth Olsen: From a very early age, I was artistic and into making things, always interested in expressing and creating. I knew I wanted to be in the arts but was misguided into thinking "artists don't make money," so I applied my thoughts to design.

After art school, I was accepted into the Fashion Institute of Technology in NYC based on a portfolio of hats. They suggested their one-year accelerated accessories program, so that's where I learned the craft of accessory- and shoe-making.

My company is in the fashion industry and changing it, but I don't consider myself to be in fashion per se, at least not the negative, ego-driven, pretentious side. It was after a full career in the industry and visiting tanneries, learning all about leather, that I created Olsenhaus.

After being involved in animal rights and veg for over twenty years, it was a natural progression to merge and create Olsenhaus. It was a way to speak for animals and expose an industry while working in it. Without this mission, I would see no need to launch yet another apparel company into the world.

TM: What elements of the design process do you like best?

EO: I like sinking into that meditative space, connecting and creating. I like the alone space I have to get into, getting total clarity of thought not only on design but clearing out negativity and maintaining balance between this material world, my soul, and worlds beyond. It's a release: I have way too many ideas, so sketching organizes the thoughts and releases them. Then sending the drawings to the factories for sample-making and seeing the idea come into the world of form is satisfying.

TM: How would you describe your design style?

EO: Minimalistic, straight-forward, clean, functional with an unexpected twist.

TM: Have you always wanted to run your own business?

EO: Actually, no, I didn't attend business school or set out to run a business. I knew that I would not be happy working in an office, doing paperwork or the same day-to-day routine. I have to be free.

I question everything, think "outside the box," and work from both left and right sides of the brain equally. Everywhere I've worked, I've revised things, so I started thinking, if I am going to put all this thought and effort into anything I do, why not build my own company and promote a much-needed message.

TM: What are the challenges you face most often? Your solutions?

EO: I did not realize going in how much I'd be educating. Being veg for so long, it was just my life, not something I always had to speak about.

I thought educating/sharing the shocking facts about leather would be enough for people to wake up. All the facts involved in the raising of animals—millions of acres of land-clearing a year; massive air, land, and water pollution—are all part of creating leather. Then there is the tanning process, which uses 225 chemicals, many of which are toxic, and is scientifically proven to cause terminal illnesses in tannery workers and people living in surrounding areas.

Leather is still widely regarded as a byproduct of the livestock industry, but it in fact supports it with twenty percent of profits coming from the sale of hides to tanneries. Not to mention the lack in consciousness to slaughter a living being.

I underestimated how deeply ingrained the perception of leather as a luxury, quality, rebellious, and sexy item was in the mass collective consciousness. So that's been the challenge: not only creating an equal product to replace it but a better product, and to educate and reprogram minds of an entire industry of misinformed store buyers. We are all seeing more expedited progress in people eating cleaner, focusing on plant-based

nutrition, and really seeing how it affects their health, but animals in fashion is still widely acceptable.

TM: What advice can you give those who aspire to run their own business?

EO: Freelance in whatever industry you want to be in, learn from as many different companies, both small startups and larger established businesses, as you can.

TM: Any suggestions for those looking to get into the world of fashion as a career?

EO: Go to school for design and learn the craft. It will help you all the way through to know the process, respect the people you'll be working with, craftsmen, who will usually be out of your country. Make a quality product with integrity; make a product that changes lives, respects the planet and all beings.

TM: What are your plans for the business? Where would you like to take it?

EO: It has always been a plan to make Olsenhaus a global lifestyle brand, expanding into different categories with a concept retail store. I believe that vegan fashion is the next wave of evolution. In footwear, I want to not only develop more recycled, repurposed, evolved materials but also make shoes more harmonious with the anatomy of the foot and reprogram the thought process of women and high heels.

TM: Anything new you're working on that you'd like to talk about?

EO: I'm writing a book on consciousness and planning a documentary exposing the industry. It's all about collapsing the old paradigm and creating a new one.

Olsenhaus was founded by Elizabeth Olsen in 2008 to illustrate that cruelty to animals, plundering, and greed are not stylish or conscious. The line has been featured in worldwide media and has a celebrity following.

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