

High fashion from old clothes

adapted from an article by Michelle Ng

1 Sustainability and fashion usually do not go hand in hand. But things might be changing. This month, Switzerland-based fashion brand Sottes created waves when it launched its waste-free collection in Singapore.

2 The label's founders are Jeanne Guenat and Elliot Upton. Their brand, Sottes, focuses on upcycling, a process in which unwanted pieces of fabric are transformed through design and creativity into something more valuable. Using waste fabric collected

from a community shop in the neighborhood, the designers work with a team of 12 local seamstresses on the designs in the collection.

3 The collection comprises shirts, jackets, pants and shorts. The designs are gender-less and size-less. The different items feature drawstrings and fastenings that allow the wearer to customize the garment to their liking. Guenat says: "With the different fastenings, both men and women of all body shapes can wear our creations. It could be high fashion on one person and streetwear on another. It's all about letting the personalities show through in your clothes."

4 In Singapore there are more brands and individuals that upcycle textile waste into clothes, accessories and bags. Local fashion brand Taikensonzai, which can be found at eco-conscious shops, has been using only upcycled fabric to make its accessories and clothes since 2014. Designer Adeline Huang uses textile scraps and off-cuts to make eclectic wearable products and accessories such as necklaces and bags. "With accessories, there's no worry about fit and comfort, unlike clothing," she says. "And I think there is still a stigma associated with second-hand clothing here."

5 Raye Padit, owner of a swapping retail store, says affordable fast fashion is one of the biggest hindrances when it comes to promoting fabric upcycling. "Costs play a big part. Why would someone pay \$100 to upcycle an old dress when you can easily buy a new one?" To provide an alternative to mindless fashion consumption, he set up The Fashion Pulpit, where store members can swap their lesser-worn clothes for "new" ones. Members are assigned points based on the quality and condition of the clothes they bring in and use these points to swap for other pieces in the store.



6 Agatha Lee is another strong upcycling advocate who shares her sewing and embroidery works on her Instagram account. Once a month, she conducts sewing and dyeing workshops. “I want to show people you can start simple by adding buttons or embellishments or even dyeing a pair of worn-out jeans. I try to make sure participants have fun and pick up new skills while having conversations about recycling and reducing waste,” she says.

7 When asked about the future of upcycled fashion, the local designers and retailers agree that educating the public is the best way forward. “Yes, upcycled clothing means it’s pre-loved, but there is nothing to be scared of. It’s just clothes. It’s the wearer who gives life to the clothes,” says Padit.

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