

MEET THE

ECO STYLISTS

By David Hayes

Want to stay up with the trends — but keep your conscience clean? Then let a green fashion adviser show you how

MODEL Laura Bailey couldn't have put it any clearer. Pictured recently in a campaigning T-shirt spelling out the simple message, 'Green is the new black', the face of Marks & Spencer left no doubt about how cool she thinks ethical fashion is at the moment.

And Bailey is not the only style-setter to get in on the ethical fashion act.

Cate Blanchett was spotted last month buying a coat from British eco label Ciel; Mischa Barton and Charlize Theron have both snapped up dresses from the debut line of London Fashion Week's ethical label, Wildlife Works; and Top Shop's ethical brand, People Tree, has a long list of devoted fans, including Helena Christensen, Lily Cole and Sting's wife, Trudie Styler.

So ethical fashion is a hot topic, but how do you turn your own wardrobe green? With so many complex issues involved, from Fairtrade to environmentally friendly fabrics, showing you care can be tricky. And, of course, you want to look good, too.

Pinning down just what constitutes 'ethical' fashion is a tricky business. With no one defining body or agency, ethical fashion is a broad catch-all term for clothing and accessories that tick one or all of the following criteria: Items from a traceable supply chain made at a factory that treats its workers fairly; uses fabrics created from sustainable sources; is organic and Soil Association approved; uses dyes and finishes that don't harm the environment and does not create a huge carbon footprint getting to the shop rail.

With all that in mind it is a wonder there is an ethical industry at all. Fashion can be a dirty business but the new breed of eco labels are at least trying to clean up their act in any way they can.

Need a helping hand? Step forward the new breed of eco stylists: Dawn Mellowship, Elizabeth Laskar and Jocelyn Whipple. Ethical makeovers may be big news Stateside, but we have caught on over here only in the past few months.

"I only set up my website, ecostylist.co.uk, at the beginning of June, but the response has been amazing," says Dawn Mellowship.

"I realised that although many people want to live more ethically, most people don't have time to trawl the internet for hours looking for ethical fashion. I have the knowledge and the time, so I decided to set up a business."

The 27-year-old politics graduate has always loved fashion but it was only when she got involved in the ethical movement that she realised how she could put her passion to good use.

A committed vegan, who now eats only organic food, she says: "I used to spend hours poring through copies of Vogue when I was little and draw page upon page of designs. I had always wanted to study fashion and almost went to London College of Fashion, but somehow ended up doing a politics degree."

"When I left college I became a writer on an independent magazine. I was researching the LA-based ethical designer Linda Lueder and became aware of how

dirty the fashion industry could be. Ethical fashion was becoming a lot more stylish with websites such as adill.com, PeopleTree.com and anatomyfashion.co.uk, so I decided to put my love of both politics and fashion to good use."

Mellowship charges as little as £5 to source an item, making green-living relatively affordable. "I style my customers — from businesswomen to busy mums — online," she says. "This is slightly different from taking people round shops."

"I can offer a whole ethical makeover to those who perhaps have started eating organic and want to take things further. This includes clothes, cosmetics, food and furniture. It is a whole lifestyle choice."

"Any free tips? My first advice to a new client is not to throw anything away. Look through your wardrobe and find things that you can wear now that won't date."

"If you do want to get rid of things, give them to charity shops or swap them on uk.freecycle.org. This website is like eBay, but instead of selling items, you exchange them. You shouldn't be too much of a slave to fashion, and should choose staple items you can update with accessories, rather than having a massive wardrobe full of stuff you will never wear."

The fast turnover of trends contributes to our throwaway culture, resulting in more than a million tonnes of textiles being binned in the UK each year. Stylist Elizabeth Laskar, 32, set up the Ethical Fashion Forum back in 2004, and has recently launched an ethical fashion consultancy service.

"The ethical lifestyle is booming at the moment," says Laskar, who did business studies at university before going into fashion and image consultancy. "It will be hard to make the fashion industry perfect, but it is possible to make improvements. I don't think products should be boycotted; if you want to wear a

big fashion label then fair enough, but why not wear it with some ethical jewellery?"

"My work with the Ethical Fashion Forum is mainly advising businesses. I recently helped a co-op in Ghana to sell their accessories in Europe," says Laskar.

"But I also like to work on a more personal level and now do one-to-one fashion consulting. People are confused and just want simple information on what to buy. There are so many factors to consider, so there is a lot to teach people when you give them an ethical re-style."

Laskar has recently converted several unlikely people to ethical fashion. "I worked with the current Miss England on a charity event and persuaded the judges at Miss UK to incorporate an ethical fashion element into one of the judging days," she says.

"When I talked to the contestants about ethical fashion, I shocked them because they were not aware of how unethical some fashion is. They are style ambassadors, so it would be great if they could spread the ethical fashion message."

Could Laskar also turn American singer Pink 'green'? "I met her last year and although she is very political she hadn't considered the fashion angle until then," she says. "I'm hoping to dress her top-to-toe in eco when she comes off tour."

"Huge fashion houses like Chanel and Dior can give away clothes to celebrities, whereas young ethical fashion labels can't afford to do that. The impetus needs to come from celebrities. We need more celebrity endorsement, as ethical fashion still isn't seen as sexy enough."

Stylist Jocelyn Whipple has ten years of experience in ethical fashion, and counts Laura Bailey and Channel 4 presenter Alexa Chung among her clients. "When I started working with organic and sustainable fabrics in 1996, there were only a few companies in the area," says 30-year-old Whipple, who studied textile design at Liverpool.

"The big fashion companies like Giorgio Armani and Ralph Lauren have now moved into ethical fabric development, and there are great materials available like hemp silk and even eco synthetics which are biodegradable."



Jocelyn Whipple: Hand-made organic cotton babydoll dress, from Equador traders in Lisbon £10; and chrome-free leather Juniper heels £95, by Terra Plana, at adill.com. Recycled candy wrapper bag by Nahui Ollin £182, at GlobalLuggage.com, globalluggage.co.uk.

Elizabeth Laskar: Blue cotton pique dress (made from recycled judo suit) by Pierre Garroudi, pierregarroudi.com; and red satin high heels, stylist's own

Dawn Mellowship: Hemp/silk and vintage embroidery shift dress, handmade one-off to order, spinachi.com and chrome-free leather and poured rubber natural sole shoes by El Natura Lista, from £59.95 elnaturalista.com

Picture: JOEL ANDERSON

Whipple went to California after leaving college and was soon involved in the growing ethical fashion movement there.

"There was much more happening in America with ethical fashion," she says. "I worked on an exhibition called the Whole Life Expo in San Francisco, and styled and produced one of the first big ethical fashion shows with 25 eco labels."

"I then moved to LA for two years, and worked for casual brand 'Natural High Lifestyle', a favourite of actor Woody Harrelson, and became more and more connected with ethical fashion. I helped set up brands such as Stuart + Brown and Del Forte Denim, the first high-fashion luxury denim brand to be totally "trace-

able" to ethical sources." After six years in the U.S., Whipple returned to London. "I found it exciting that there were so many new brands here," she says. "London Fashion Week now has its own ethical fashion area, so the movement has really progressed."

Whipple combines up-and-coming ethical labels, vintage finds and one-off pieces — an approach she wants to pass on through her website, spinachi.com. Personal consultations with Whipple cost from £300.

"One of the biggest problems with ethical fashion is that although it is all out there, people just don't know about it. I want to make it available," she says. "It is also confusing as to exactly what 'ethical fashion' is. There is no one agency

that can give you all the information, something that I hope will soon change."

"You can be fashionable and ethical now; a few years ago that would have been difficult," she says.

"Many of the people who pioneered ethical fashion were entrepreneurs not designers. Now there are a lot more designers, so it is easy to source almost anything you want. You simply ask: what it is made of and where it comes from."

"It annoys me when people say: 'I would buy ethical if it was cheaper.' Fashion has become so cheap because labour wages and standards have been pushed downwards. What people see as expensive is actually only closer to the prod-

uct's true cost. It is much better to spend more on one great ethical piece than buy three items that will fall apart after a few months."

■ **DAWN MELLOWSHIP**, dawn@ecostylist.co.uk; **Elizabeth Laskar**, consult@ethicalfashionforum.com; **Jocelyn Whipple**, info@spinachi.com

Drop in pictures: Denim hot pants £85, by Del Forte, adill.com. Stripe tie neck blouse £60, by Emiline 4 Re Unique, thenaturalstore.co.uk. Hand-painted bead bracelet £35, by Made, adill.com. Leaf print shopper £89, by Amazon Life, adill.com. Amelia shoes, £45, by Bourgeois Boheme, from bboheme.com

