

# A COOL NEW LEAF

**The Bright Green Fashion challenge demonstrates the potential of green design.**

words : terri peters

An experimental event showcasing young fashion designers from Berlin and Copenhagen at this fall's Copenhagen Design Week proved that sustainability and bold design should no longer be considered mutually exclusive. Earlier this year, designers from five fashion labels in Copenhagen traveled to Berlin to take part in the "Next Vision: Bright Green Fashion" challenge, which taught them and their German counterparts the skills necessary to make design sustainable. At Design Week, the 10 debuted capsule collections of sustainable fashion alongside their new collections, allowing a full house at the Copenhagen City Hall venue to view a vast range of design approaches that challenged the idea of a "sustainable" aesthetic.

Project manager Wickie Meier explains that the clothing had to be more than just sustainable for sustainability's sake. "We all agreed that it was important to create clothing that is both wearable and desirable." To this end, the challenge encouraged Danish and Berlin designers—both newcomers and established labels—to exchange ideas and experiences in lectures, workshops and roundtable discussions at Berlin's Esmod International Fashion School during their three-month sustainable design project.

During the workshops, rules were set: All designs must use only natural or recycled materials, with no bleach or chemical treatments, and all must be locally produced or, at least, certified fair trade. But to those watching the Design Week catwalk show, where each designer presented 10 outfits—of which a



minimum of three had to follow the sustainability rules—it was impossible to spot the "green" designs. Each of the designers presented pieces that were radical, youthful and textured. Does this point to a future where "green" is synonymous with "quality," rather than presenting a series of limitations for designers? Could sustainable design ever be the norm?

"I don't want sustainability to be always obvious," says Copenhagen-based Jean-Phillip Dyeremose. "I find it way more sexy not to know it, because often you can't tell the difference." Danish designer Trine Wackerhausen agrees. "To avoid 'green washing,' I prefer that sustainability is not used as a sales point, but rather as a natural ingredient in a collection." Wackerhausen presented a collection of floaty, feminine forms with ruffled collars in contrasting peach tones with matte black and tie-dye. Her material choices incorporate sustainable silks and glittery Lurex—a combination she calls "a mix of no-no's and good conscience."

Incorporating sustainable ideas into pieces without losing the design intent can be difficult. "Sustainability and fashion sometimes appear to be so opposite, and to get the two together is a challenge," says Berlin-based Friederike von Wedel-Parlow. She admits she is often frustrated with the limitations. "With sustainable fabrics, the choice is limited, so you are forced to find other solutions as the fabrics are often so basic." Still, the designer calls this sustainable capsule collection "a new start." "At the moment, I am looking for more concentration, reduction and the essence of what I am up to—green fashion might be the answer," she says.

Wackerhausen doesn't believe that sustainable design should come before creative expression. "I strongly feel this is the general position among my colleagues in the business. In a way, we're all waiting

for the sustainable fabric manufacturers and agents to update their portfolios and make them more visible. As it is now, we have quite a hard time finding the right suppliers."

Material selection was also an issue for Dyeremose. His collection features asymmetrical designs, contrasting shiny and matte black with filmy, transparent fabrics. He laments, "I was not able to get the shiny material that I hold so dear," but he is going to use it anyway, mixing other sustainable elements into his process. "I'm going to do what I can to make the fabrication and design processes sustainable, and that still means making a difference."

Beyond material, the fabrication process is often wasteful, and von Wedel-Parlow was one of the designers to address this in her collection. "In normal production, sometimes half of the fabric is just wasted," she says. She chose to see this as a design challenge for her collection, cutting the fabric into strips and putting them together again, wrapping straight lines around the model's shapely body. "I was playing with volume. The long dress looks like a ripped-off flag once you lay it on the floor or hang it in the wind, so the reduction of waste on the pattern side is quite strong."

In the creative industries—from architecture, to product design, to fashion design, to art—sustainability is going beyond a PR selling point or novelty. It's actually pushing the boundaries of material, form and style, challenging designers and consumers to demand more, not less, from their designs. Under Meier's leadership, Bright Green Fashion approaches sustainability as a creative opportunity, with designers learning more about their process and questioning their preconceptions. "[The project] may not be 100% perfect, but the world is not perfect," she says. "It is a project in the making, and it is bright green."

**Does this point to a future where "green" is synonymous with "quality?"**



Above: image courtesy of Tarané Hoock. Opposite (from left): Bright Green Fashion by Friederike von Wedel-Parlow, photo by Özgür Albayrak; fashion by Trine Wackerhausen, photo by Jan Rasmus Voss; fashions by Jean-Phillip Dyeremose, photo by Jan Rasmus Voss.