

Sustainable style goals

Three Toronto makers talk eco-friendly practices and style we can feel good about

Living more sustainably has become a goal for so many of us. Gap Inc. is there along with us in trying to make its practices more sustainable, implementing innovations at every one of its brands—Gap, Old Navy, Banana Republic and coming soon to Canada, Athleta. “We’re committed to being a force for good, and that includes protecting nature and contributing to the health of all the communities our business reaches,” says Kirsty Stevenson, Gap Inc.’s senior director of global sustainability. “We’re on track to reach our ambitious goals to improve people’s access to water, reduce waste and carbon emissions, and source more sustainable fibres.”

About those goals: Since 2014, Gap Inc. has saved over 11 billion litres of water in the production of its garments. It will also improve access to drinking water and sanitation for 2 million people in cotton-growing and textile-manufacturing communities in India by 2023. And the company plans to eliminate single-use plastic by 2030 (to start, it will increase the recycled content of its e-commerce mailers to 50 per cent beginning this summer).

Clothing-wise, Gap’s most sustainable collection to date, dubbed Generation Good, is made with organic fibres while ensuring water savings and emissions management practices at its supplier facilities. In partnership with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Banana Republic has launched rivet-free denim made with organic cotton and mushroom-derived finishing for easier recyclability. This spring, Old Navy launched its Mineral Dye collection, made using 59 per cent less water than conventional dyeing. It also plans to have US & Canada stores signed up to its hanger recycling program by the end of this year, and eliminate plastic shopping bags in North America by 2023. The new brand in town, Athleta, is a certified B Corp (read: it meets the highest standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability) that offers stylish lifestyle gear for all body sizes, from XXS-3X.

To show how good sustainable looks and feels, we enlisted three Toronto makers to wear their spring picks and share their approach to sustainability.

GLASS BLOWER NADIRA NARINE, ► HYPERPRECIOUS

How did you become a glass blower? “I moved from Panama to Canada in 2011 with the intentions of pursuing a career in computer science. I quickly realized I wanted to do something in a creative space. I ended up at Sheridan College, where I discovered the glass blowing program. I love everything about glass: the community, the material, the process of blowing and the fact that there are so many ways you can work with glass. In 2017, I graduated and was accepted into Harbourfront Centre’s Artist-in-Residence Program.”

Can you describe some of your favourite pieces? “My ‘party cups’ are definitely a favourite. I’m also working on a cocktail set that includes a mixing cup and a set of glasses.”

What do you love about the outfit you’re wearing? “I love the patterns and bright colours. I’ve always dressed like that—my parents encouraged my sisters and I to not be afraid to stand out, and I try to bring that into my work as well. I felt comfortable and confident in this outfit.”

What has been your experience with Old Navy in the past? “I love Old Navy jeans—they are so comfortable and durable; I blow glass in them almost religiously. I think about the fact that I wear ‘fast fashion’ quite often. I would love to have more sustainable clothing in my closet, but unfortunately most sustainable brands are out of my price range. So when brands like Old Navy transition into being more sustainable it allows me to feel better about the purchases I’m making.”



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◀ CERAMICIST MICHELLE ORGAN, MIMA CERAMICS

What do you love most about working with clay? “It keeps my body busy but lets my mind calm down and focus. You have to forget everything else and work with the clay and the wheel, and if you are distracted, things just won’t work out.”

How does sustainability play into your work? “There is a lot that can be improved in terms of the ingredients used in the process, including the clay itself, but also the chemicals, minerals and colourants. On a smaller scale, I try to recycle as much clay as possible.”

What do you love about this outfit? “I love to get dressed up, but clay is a messy and dusty material, so denim and an apron are my most-worn items. After a year of denim and sweats, wearing this dress made me feel good about myself.”

What has been your experience with Banana Republic in the past? “I have always been a fan of its petite offerings. To be able to walk into the store and have clothing fit off the hanger is such a nice feeling. Knowing that a focus on sustainability is now at the forefront of the brand, it makes the clothing that much more appealing.”

MACRAME ARTIST ANGELA TCHANG, ► FREE AND FIBRE

How did you become a macrame artist? “Like so many others, I struggled with finding my purpose. It wasn’t until I started tying knots and creating something beautiful with my hands that I was reawakened. In 2020 I became a full-time maker. As with most new small businesses, there are ups and downs, but when you believe in yourself, you can do amazing things.”

How does sustainability play into your work? “My creative process is well planned out and I do my best to avoid any waste. I forage all of the sticks and branches used for my work unless the client requests otherwise. Most of my rope is made with recycled cotton. Any scraps are saved and stored for future use. Not wanting to waste any of my materials is sort of an obsession of mine and one day, I hope to create an entire collection utilizing all my leftover materials.”

What do you love most about the Gap outfit you’re wearing “I’m so excited to wear the jeans! They seriously bring me back to the ‘70s. And the button-down is lightweight and perfect for a summer night.”

What has been your experience with the Gap in the past? “Gap has always been a staple for me, from my favourite denim jacket when I was teenager to countless pairs of comfy jeans. I think all brands should be working towards becoming more sustainable. It makes me proud to wear a brand that is doing their part to improve the world we know today.”



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