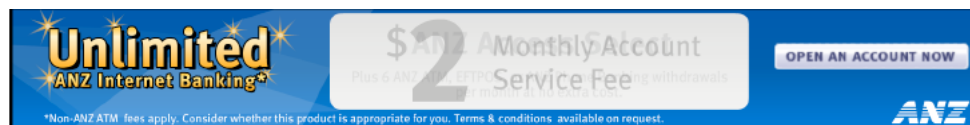


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June 05, 2007 09:30am

LOOKING good uses a lot of resources, but two Melbourne women are reducing fashion's eco-footprint, reports Annalise Walliker.

Sustainable fashion sounds like a trip down hippie lane: hemp pants, chunky multicolour knits from incense-filled stores, and frustrating but well-meaning hours scouring your local Savers.

It's hardly the domain of chic fashionistas, but with green fast becoming the new black, fashion is just another part of our lives that's gone eco-a-go-go.

Two Melbourne women are causing a buzz around Australia and the world for their part in reducing the ecological footprint fashion makes on the planet - without sacrificing class and wearability.

Self-described fashion activist Kate Pears started clothes-swap project My Sister's Wardrobe three years ago while studying the effects of the wasteful consumption of fashion on the environment and economy.

The name comes from the idea her events are like raiding your sister's clothes, emerging victorious with goodies she doesn't want.

Shocked by the amount of energy, chemical processes and resources used to make and transport clothes, the RMIT PhD student and industrial design tutor was spurred into creating the project.

Even one T-shirt uses 1.5kg of harmful chemicals to be created, Pears, 27, says.

"By trading second-hand clothes that have already been made and discarded, you're reducing the demand for new things and have a zero ecological footprint.

"People are buying clothes and treating them like Kleenex; some are getting so cheap that people wear them a couple of times and feel like it's OK to just discard them."

A 2005 study by the Australia Institute found we spend more than \$10.5 billion each year on stuff we end up throwing out.

Unwanted frocks, tops and other clothes came in third highest on the list - and second highest for young consumers - worth a staggering \$1.7 billion.

With Australians becoming more affluent and spending more each year, and fashion low on people's environmental radars, Pears says the amount is probably much higher.

After honing her project into a sell-out event at this year's L'Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival, Pears' baby has become a monthly event at funky city laneway bar the Croft Institute.

Held on the last Thursday of each month, women bring six items of clothing they value but no longer wear and exchange each one for a button.

Entry is \$14, which includes a free drink to relax while the quirky boutique is set up.

You "buy" new clothes with each item worth one button, giving your wardrobe a revamp for less than the cost of a movie.

"There's a whole spectrum of clothes. I've seen a tutu and rollerskates, but there were a whole heap of designers who turned up at the last minute with bagfuls of Prada and Gucci," Pears says.

My Sister's Wardrobe: www.clothingexchange.com.au (<http://www.clothingexchange.com.au>)

The next event is June 28 (bookings essential).

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