

ECO Friendly Fashion

An Eco-Friendly Fashion Statement—An Interview With Fashion Designer Beth Doane
Posted by Jordan Carlton Schaul of University of Alaska on April 18, 2012

Inspired by her time living abroad, Beth Doane, at the age of 22 started Andira — an import and distribution company, which brought pricy European fashion labels to high-end American consumers. Within a few years the ambitious and enterprising entrepreneur found herself disenchanted with the fashion industry. Despite the exposure to fascinating cultures abroad and opportunities to immerse herself in an eclectic and ever-changing industry, she felt unfulfilled, if not altogether disappointed and distraught. Besides asking the typical questions about the merchandise in terms of market value and aesthetics, Beth inquired about the darker side of the industry she was starting to see more of—what she refers to as the toxicity of mass production. I caught up with Beth this week to ask her about the unconventional direction she took Andira and how she turned her frustration with how fashion is made into an entirely new venture that has changed the way other clothing brands are doing business.

TED Talk

JS: You've said that your entire life was green, but you really had no idea that green had become trendy?

BD: I was raised surrounded by nature and wildlife and my parents were very environmentally aware. We were recycling, had food gardens, and ate local organic meat and produce for years before these things were made "green activities". When I started to see the "Green Movement" take shape it was frustrating because I saw a lot of companies and brands taking advantage of the "natural product" trend and using it in their marketing while not truly making their products any more environmentally responsible.

JS: Please explain your specific concerns about the fashion industry. You suggest that it was nowhere near as glamorous as you expected, but even worse, you discovered things were not openly discussed among industry professionals.

Honduras

BD: There is an entirely dark side of the apparel industry that the consumer does not see. For example, most of our apparel and accessories are made in countries where workers rights are not honored and where millions of garment workers are exposed to dangerous levels of chemical toxins and carcinogens

every day. For example in water proofing garments Perfluorinated (PFOs) or "eternal"

compounds” are used. These are known to be carcinogenic, cause birth defects, alter thyroid function and impair our immune systems. Its crazy to me that something so dangerous is used in our apparel. Over the last few years sandblasting has also been brought to the public’s attention. It’s a process where manufacturers can give denim a worn or faded look but has caused over 5,000 cases of silicosis and even death from garment workers inhaling silica in the process. While it has been outlawed in some places sandblasting is still said to be used in areas of China, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and even Northern Africa. I have also witnessed cases where workers have been forced to sew apparel seven days a week with only two small meals a day and in housing conditions that we would find deplorable. The International Labour Organization also estimates there are 246 million child-workers (age 5 to 14) in the world today.

JS: What impact does hyper-consumerism and mass production have on the environment.

RainTees

BD: At the rate our population is expanding and the rate rapidly developing countries are expanding their level of product consumption and mass production it becomes nearly impossible to ensure safe preservation of our natural resources for the future. In general, when we look at manufacturing worldwide, we find that environmental standards are not enforced or minimally enforced to the point where we are polluting our air, water and land at a devastating rate. In fashion, the dyeing process of garments alone has polluted billions of gallons of water per year and caused disease and even death. Its so important we look at how we are making the products we are consuming more closely.

JS: You realized that your goals were not only inconsistent with environmental stewardship, but they completely contradicted the respect and level of appreciation for the natural world that you once had as a child growing up on a small farm in the Midwest.

BD: That’s true. My work has taught me so much about how many industries operate and where major change needs to occur. I have also found that there are more and more people committed to changing production standards. When we look at the price tag on a piece of apparel and it costs \$4.00 ...there is no way that equation is sustainable considering the labor, the natural resources, the shipping and everything else it takes to bring a garment to market. We have to educate ourselves as consumers and make conscious purchasing choices.

JS: Raintees, your newest endeavor was inspired by your love of the Amazon. Tell us about it.

BD: I created RainTees by donating school supplies to children living in endangered rainforests and asking them to draw what they see happening around them. Every RainTee is handmade in the USA with eco-friendly fabrics and features the original artwork created by these children. So many of these youth live in countries facing environmental destruction, poverty, and little or no access to education. For every tee sold, a tree is planted in a critically endangered area of the world through our charity partner, Trees for the Future. Trees for the Future has planted nearly 65 million trees since 1988, and helped thousands of communities in Central America, Africa, and Asia improve their livelihoods and environment through cutting edge agroforestry and reforestation projects. Each year, these trees remove over one million tons of CO2 from the atmosphere and its RainTees' mission to plant trees with tees and create art programs for children around the world. I turned Andira into a consulting firm and help clients design and launch products while remaining as eco-conscious as possible. I have had the privilege to work with some really amazing brands in the process and partner with some wonderful organizations.