

5 Minutes with...

Style Consultant Betsy Ames



Why is so much apparel produced in ways that are unfriendly to workers and the environment?

The bottom line? Like many companies today, they want to make a profit.

Who are the “bad guys” in this scenario?

Companies that treat their employees like slaves, and that dump toxic waste. Companies that use cheap labor to produce garments and then charge the customer a huge mark-up. Doesn't it make you wonder, when you see *70% Off* or *50% Off*, why is it so expensive in the first place?

What should consumers think about before purchasing a garment?

You should see where it is made and think about the work conditions and environmental record of that country. You should look at the content of the garment. We can't avoid buying polyester, but if you are purchasing it, make sure it doesn't end up in a landfill—because it does not decompose like plastic water bottles. Also, ask yourself, “Will I wear it frequently?”

How helpful are labels?

They are and they aren't. While we've become much more aware of how food and beauty products are produced, unfortunately the facts behind fashion's impact on the environment is still uncharted territory. My business, Mindful Style, is about educating and enlightening people as to how clothing is made, what it's made from and what the ramifications of their choices are.

Who's doing a good job in terms of transparency?

Patagonia, Levi's, Everlane, and many, many smaller brands. There is a link at ecofashionworld.com that takes you to a list, and that list grows every day, thanks to this important trend in mindful fashion.

What are some of the things people can do to shop more responsibly, or be more mindful in their clothing purchases?

Besides *not* shopping in the obvious places—like Forever 21, H&M, Top Shop, Zara, Target, Walmart and big box stores—ask yourself some questions: Is the garment durable? Is it a natural fiber and can it be taken care of easily? Is it a classic style that I will wear many times? And what do I know about how this product is made?

What if a company is not transparent about its manufacturing?

It's hard to get 100% sustainable in all of one's garments. However, my philosophy is that even if it has polyester, if it's made well and I will wear it frequently, then I know I have purchased something of value. If you answer Yes to those first three questions, it may still be a worthwhile purchase. **EDGE**

Editor's Note: In 2014, Betsy Ames launched **Mindful Style**, a resource company that works with clients to analyze their needs, edit their wardrobes and reduce their impact on the environment. She worked for *Glamour* magazine for three years before becoming a personal shopper; her clients have included Robert DeNiro, Diana Ross and Barbra Streisand. For more information on Betsy, log onto www.mindfulstyle.com.