



UPCYCLING

In a world still churning out trendy throw-away fashion pieces at breakneck speed, the idea of upcycled or refashioned apparel can be an anomaly. But it is a continuously growing trend and is one of the most sustainable things people can do in fashion. As upcycling makes use of already existing pieces, it often uses few resources in its creation and actually keeps 'unwanted' items out of the waste stream.

There are more textiles produced in the world today than can be used — many of the large clothing chains can produce as many as a half a billion garments a year. And what happens to those clothes after they have fulfilled their 'useful' lives? About 14.3 million tons of textiles were sent to the landfill in 2012, or around 5.7 percent increase in the volume of secondhand clothing has driven down its value in the past 15 years

— meaning that charity shop stores are now filled with cheap fashion and junky basics instead of vintage gems.

In addition, massive amounts of donated clothing that are not deemed as 're-sellable' in the U.S. are shipped to developing countries, inundating them with unnecessary goods that stifle any emerging economic development in textiles. While

Yes, your clothes have an afterlife

many people may have the idea that they are helping clothe the poor in these countries,

access to the Internet and cell phones has made many of these countries more fashion-forward recently, and they may have no interest in our American cast-offs. Since this model relies on a waste economy — where instead of mending clothes or leasing clothes, items are bought and discarded — what happens when exportation is no longer an option?

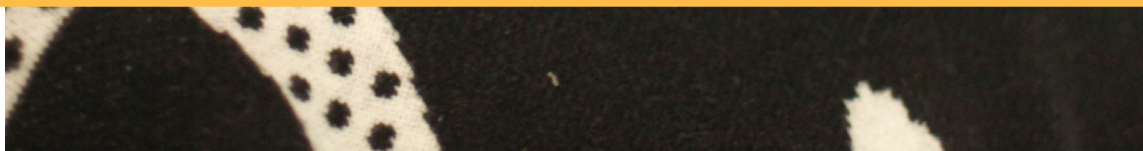
The New Wave of Sustainable Fashion

By Beth Stewart of Redress

What is upcycling?

Upcycling is a way of processing an item to make it better than the original. In the example of clothing, this is often taking something that doesn't fit or is stained/ torn and refashioning a wearable product from it.

Upcycling can be done using either pre-consumer or post-consumer waste or a combination of the two. Pre-consumer waste is produced while items are being manufactured (such as the pieces of fabric leftover after cutting out a pattern) and post-consumer waste results from the finished product reaching the end of its useful life for the consumer (such as a T-shirt that doesn't fit anymore).



Benefits of upcycling

Upcycling stops adding stuff to a world that is already overwhelmed with material things. It also reuses materials that may otherwise end up in the landfill in creative and innovative ways – producing original often one-of-a-kind items from what many consider to be waste. It is a way for companies and designers to be more efficient with leftover materials such as upholstery scraps or vintage textiles and to give new life to worn-out jeans and tattered T-shirts.

“As we move into the '90s revival, grunge will be back, and upcycling will fit that look perfectly. I predict modern upcycling will actually look “upcycled,” but with a much edgier feel.” – Orsola de Castro, Co-founder of Estethica, From Somewhere, and Reclaim to Wear; via Ecouterre's 37 Eco-fashion Predictions for 2014

Whether as everyday apparel or runway exhibition pieces, upcycling can challenge cultural codes — questioning what we consider to be trash versus fashion or beautiful versus ugly. For some it can also be a connection to our heritage — incorporating vintage clothing or using a family heirloom to create an original piece preserving a bit of history.

Who is upcycling?

The world of upcycling has exploded in the past few years, and there is a plethora of inspirational design in this facet of eco-fashion. An excellent summary of many designers throughout the world can be found in the newly released book “ReFashioned” by Sass Brown.

To see some great examples on the runway, Redress Raleigh's annual Spring eco-fashion show often features innovative designers using upcycling in their collections. Mother/daughter team Zass Design creates gorgeous jewelry from overlooked materials. And Little Grey Line takes old men's work shirts and remakes them into adorable dresses for little girls. This coming spring's show will also feature a North Carolina State University student duo using denim remnants, a Durham-based designer creating chic handbags made from plastic bags, and another NCSU student showcasing how simple white

T-shirts can become an elegant wedding dress.

In addition, a few companies are recognizing the combination of nostalgia and sentimentality many of us have about our clothing and seizing the opportunity to create memorable objects from apparel. Project Repat, based out of Boston, Mass., is one such example that creates quilts out of old T-shirts — a great way to commemorate all your favorite concert gear without having a closet exploding with shirts that don't fit anymore.

As consumers start realizing the devastating effects of fast fashion, they will begin looking for innovative ways to change their wardrobe. Upcycled apparel can be a part of this revolution — helping people make meaningful choices with their clothing while appreciating the history of the industry.



12 Innovative Ways to Re-purpose Old Clothes

By Rebecca Deczynski

1. Produce Bag

A couple of snips and stitches turn an unwanted t-shirt into a reusable grocery bag: [deliacreates.com](#)

2. Boat Neck Top

Save a large polo by altering it into a tailored shirt: [merricksart.com](#)

3. Sweater Pillow

Save a sweater with raggedy sleeves by stitching the torso into a super cuddly pillow: [sometimes-homemade.com](#)

4. Jersey Shorts

A neglected tee becomes a pair of soft jammy shorts for yourself or your little one: [kojo-designs.com](#)

5. Denim Rug

A collection of worn-out jeans turns into a thing of beauty with this intensive, yet satisfying project: [sunshinescreations.vintagethreads.com](#)

6. Sweater mittens

By simply cutting out shapes and sewing them together, an unwearable sweater gets repurposed into a pair o toasty mittens: [abeautifulmess.com](#)

7. Peplum Dress

For the skilled sewer, a dated men's shirt is just a fashionable peplum dress to-be: [trashtocouture.com](#)

8. Flannel Scarf

Baggy flannel PJs become instantly chic when turned into a plaid infinity scarf: [brittanymakes.com](#)

9. Sweater Skirt

For the tween or teen in your life, a tired sweater turns into a trendy mini skirt with a couple of new seams: [.designsbyessa.com](#)

10. Rag Rug

A collection of worn-out t-shirts are snipped and threaded together to create an explosive rug: [mollykaystoltz.com](#)

11. Jean Quilt

Use old jeans and flannel to make an awesome quilt: [becinourbonnet.com](#)

12. Winter Hat

Turn your old sweater into a cute hat: [craftingintherain.com](#)



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