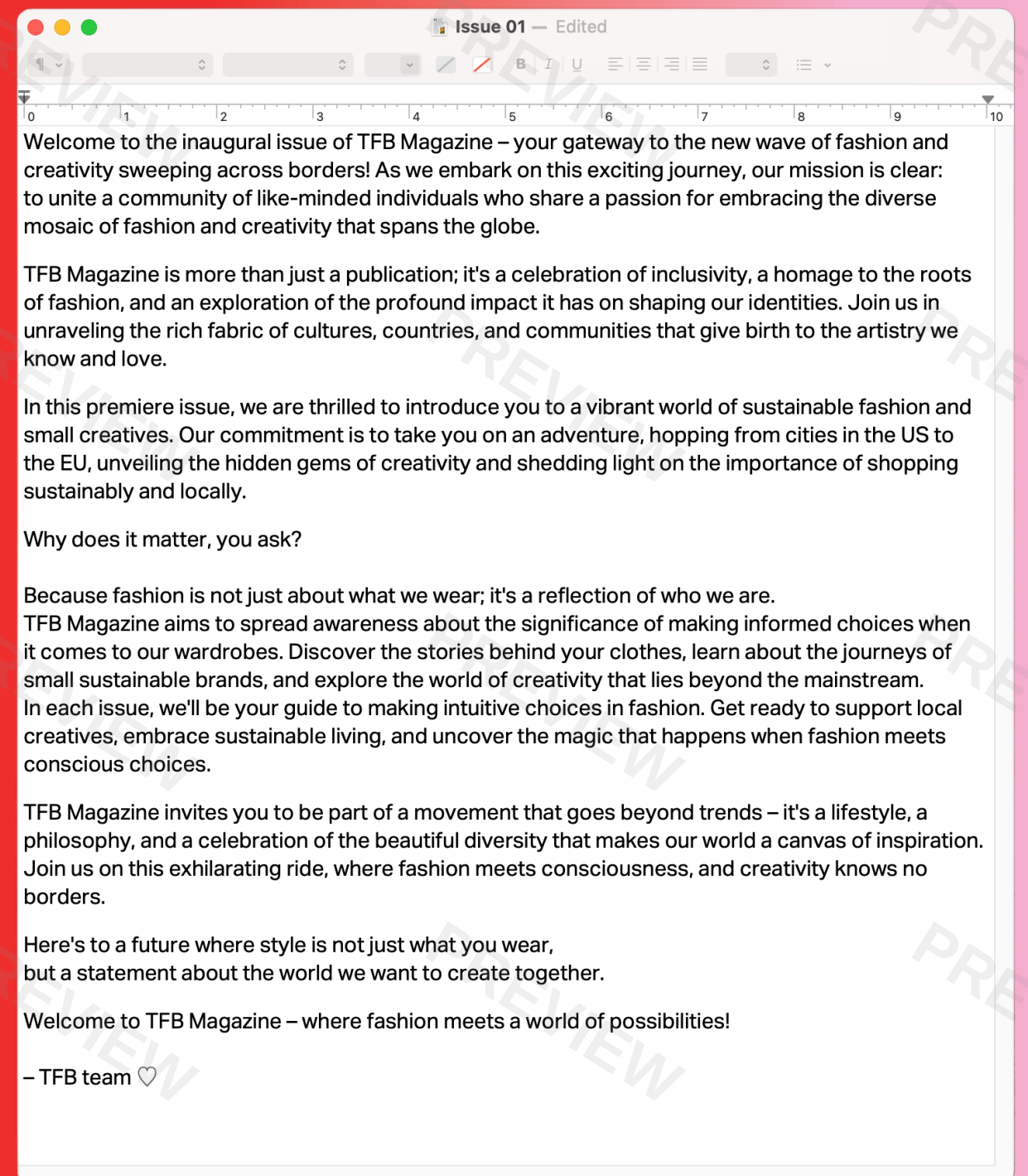


TFB *Magazine*



PREVIEW
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Modern Day

Where do our wardrobes come from? Where do the garments we select truly begin their lives? What does that say about the choices we make? What does this entire industry culminate in through our consumption, the values we represent, the environments we alter and the history that we wear everyday! Ok, woah, maybe too many heavy hitting questions at once. But really, what we know and understand about the true roots of our garments has incredible and lasting effects on the future of fashion!

When we take the time to get to know more about the historical timeline of our garments, the material compositions, the making origins and even the many cultures and hands that have touched our garments, only then can we grow a deeper appreciation for them. In an era where conscious consumerism is gaining much needed prominence, understanding the origins and history of our garments has become a pivotal catalyst of responsible fashion. Beyond aesthetics, delving into the background of what we wear holds significant importance. Each piece carries a narrative – from the raw materials used to the skilled hands that crafted it. This connection is what transforms clothing from mere commodities into tangible artefacts, sparking a sense of appreciation for the artistry and labour invested in every garment.

Fashion for Good, a sustainable fashion museum and innovation platform in the heart of Amsterdam has recently explored this concept with their exhibition ‘Knowing Cotton Otherwise’ which aimed to collect the unknown and untold stories behind cotton’s global history. One of its curators and educators Alyxandra Westwood agrees with this sentiment of our garments holding stories,

stating “A garment is always a carrier of multiple layers of information and can often be seen as a mode of communication in which no words are needed. A single piece of clothing even has the power to communicate also even hidden messages, signing who we are and what we stand for. It is important to be aware of these qualities of clothes going back centuries, as it helps us to also form personal relationships with these items in order to become more aware of our clothing choices and the impact we have on the world.” Her perspective emphasises an importance on knowing and holding appreciation for the histories of our garments as well as knowing our own individual values and utilising these as a tool to inform our consumption choices — these choices have real world implications and impact.

But how does this all affect the future of fashion? Well fashion is in a constant state of flux; what consumers choose to make important, the industry will react to. Tech is more efficiently implemented than ever, yet the global supply chain system still rules with hyper fast fashion being more popular than ever so how we appreciate the past and our garments life cycles will redefine what sustainability means in the future. We can create true, lasting changes with how the industry operates in reaction to consumer needs – an educated buyer (that’s you) is one who is ready to put their money where their mind is.

The desire to know the origins and history of our garments is not just a trend but a conscious choice towards a more responsible and mindful approach to fashion. It transcends fickle trends, becoming a transformative journey that empowers consumers to shape a future where fashion is not just about what we wear but also about the stories we choose to embrace through our garments.

Sustainability

Knowing the history of our clothing and its psychological impact on us today allows us to apply a deeper meaning to these possessions and is therefore an integral function in being able to move about the world with a true sense of self. Amsterdam based writer, editor, consultant and Fashion Psychology expert Pak Chiu follows this mentality, sharing his views around the Psychology of what we wear “It’s common how we use objects to symbolise who we are and where we want to be. From the psychology of possessions and the extended self, we understand the human tendencies to ascribe objects, including clothes, with public and private meanings”.

So, practically speaking, how can we work towards this in our own wardrobes and future consumption? Start by understanding that each piece you possess carries a narrative – from the raw materials used to the hands that crafted it all the way back to the historical significance of its style and construction. This connection transforms clothing from mere commodities into tangible personal artefacts, sparking a sense of appreciation for the artistry and labour invested in every garment. Following this we urge you to research brands thoroughly, develop a personal connection to the brands that align with your values and that you really want to invest your money in, decode all the labels hidden meanings to best caretaker your items for longevity and engage in community discussions around the development of fashion and styles that truly interest you. This all contributes to a richer understanding and deeper personal connection to the garments you choose to wear

– because what you wear truly is a choice, so make it matter.

In Conversation with

We have all fallen for it at one point or another. The pretty words and vague promises of recycled fibres and imagery of women in beige clothing gently embracing and smiling – probably frolicking in a field. The big fashion giants employ expert marketing teams to do just this, make us buy shit, sneakily twisting words, facts and figures to convince us that they (pinky promise) hand-made this item lovingly from triple recycled local organic cotton when in actuality this fast-fashion fantasy is far from the truth. A once fast fashion devotee, Sara Dubbeldam (@when_sara_smiles), decided to break free from the toxic cycle of overconsumption and began her journey towards a more sustainable fashion future – there began 'When Sara Smiles' an online personal diary, which has since blossomed into a renowned platform championing sustainable fashion. Since then Sara's role has evolved into that of a pioneer in the fashion activist space, culminating in a significant victory in 2023 with her successful greenwashing case against Primark. Central to her work is a nuanced perspective on sustainability, coupled with an infectious enthusiasm to involve others in her inspiring journey. TFB mag writer Emily Cooper sat with Sara to discuss the many peaks and valleys of a sustainable fashion journey, where people can make a start and how she envisions the future of fashion.

Sara Dubbeldamn





Can you discuss a little more on the impact that false marketing or 'green-washing' has on consumer buying habits from your experience?

There's SO MUCH greenwashing - the outcome of a Changing Markets report in 2021 was that 59% of the investigated brands were guilty of some form of greenwashing. I've been doing brand analyses for years now and if you look at brands closely, you'll see that most of them indeed are; even sustainable brands. The lack of proof (/ transparency) really stands out here (compared to other forms of greenwashing), for example: so many companies state on their website that their products are ethically produced, without sharing any evidence.

For me, the danger of greenwashing mostly lies within the confusion it creates about which brands and products are genuinely sustainable and which are not. The ultra fast fashion giants have the budgets and visibility to reach the masses compared to truly sustainable pioneers - who have tiny budgets that they rather invest in innovation and fair pay instead of marketing. Then we have the consumers who possess limited knowledge about sustainability, and who tend to believe brands quickly, especially if they like to shop from them and utilise the green claims by fast fashion brands to alleviate their guilt about overconsumption.

How has the prevalence of greenwashing in fast-fashion marketing affected consumers' perceptions of sustainability - and to what extent do you think it has contributed to a sense of consumer complacency regarding overconsumption?

It's important to acknowledge the current unequal playing field in which powerful polluters reach and influence the masses instead of truly sustainable brands. They get to shape and narrow people's perception of sustainability, which is mostly focused on materials or recycling only. Any brand that only communicates with so-called sustainable materials and leaves important topics such as social sustainability or conscious consumption only keeps consumers from changing their behaviour.

What role can regulations and industry standards play in preventing greenwashing?

ESSENTIAL! In the eight years I've been writing about this, I've always focused on changing consumer behaviour. But still, even people who've followed me all long, and even myself, find it hard to determine if a brand is lying or not. This is frustrating and this year, and especially in my Primark case, it made me realise that true systemic change comes mostly top-down. So I will focus more on putting pressure on politics and maybe building more law related cases to create awareness and work on bigger impact.

What are the current shortcomings of the existing regulations around greenwashing and sustainable misinformation?

So many, but transparency and consumer psychology and the allowing of overconsumption culture are my biggest issues. It's insane that lots of brands still use vague and misleading terms without consequences, although it is slowly changing. The current legislation demands no transparency at all!

Chances or improvements to governance and consumer consumption that are necessary to ensure more transparent and accurate communication about the environmental impact of fashion & textiles.

Push brands to disclose their production numbers - how can we ever compare sustainable ambitions to the real impact brands have if we have NO clue how much they're overproducing? I love the British Speak Volumes campaign! (make sure to check that out online) We also need to create an equal/fair playing field for advertising: big polluters should be restricted in their visibility. I've seen Gemeente Utrecht banning fast fashion and fossil fuel polluters bus posters from now on and I'd love to see something similar everywhere else and the same for online - Temu is for most people the first brand that pops on Google when searching for anything and it's the same for Shein's visibility on socials like TikTok, which is extremely addictive itself. This buy trap makes it almost impossible not to buy. I think the regulations around sales, like Black Friday, need to be managed. We can have unlimited sale periods

here, putting so much pressure on the system and the production chain. Belgium has two fixed 'soldered' periods during the year. That's a big step in the right direction. Finally I think people deserve transparent & validated information – like an obligated eco label in our clothing that says how and where it's made and has information about the quality and what to do at the end of life. The government is working on something, but it's complicated to develop and will take a while.

What are some 'best practices' people can make towards becoming, for lack of a better term, better consumers?

Think before you buy! And don't always believe everything a brand is saying. Always check external platforms, Google and read the news and of course speak up & ask critical questions! Ask for more transparency! On social media, through sending emails to brands. They won't change unless we demand them to.

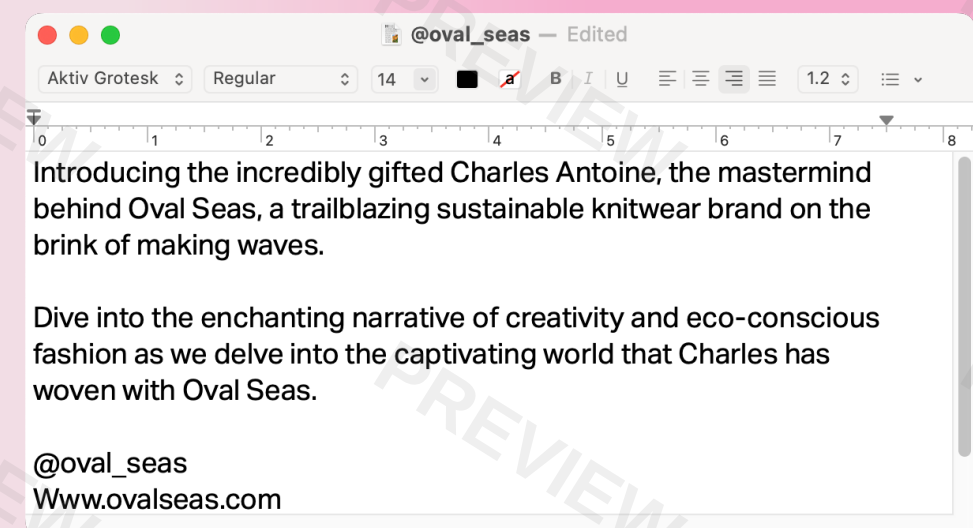
Where would you encourage people to start or things to keep in mind or resources to recommend when initially starting with sustainable fashion?

The most sustainable item is already in your closet, be aware of what you have. I'm now digitising my wardrobe through the Whering app. I really recommend it! Consumers need to be aware of the fact that there's no perfect 'sustainable' way – something people new to this often think, that everything is very black and white. There are many choices to be made in sustainability and what is often better is producing locally in Holland to minimise the environmental impact and re-build the maker industry here; or to produce in a high risk country and actively improve labour conditions from within to improve the inhumane system WE created there in the first place. There are so many apparent contradictions and every choice is right. I miss the nuance in most stories.

Sara hopes that through sharing her experiences and through her platform she is able to help consumers develop a more critical mindset and inspire more people with brands that do better.

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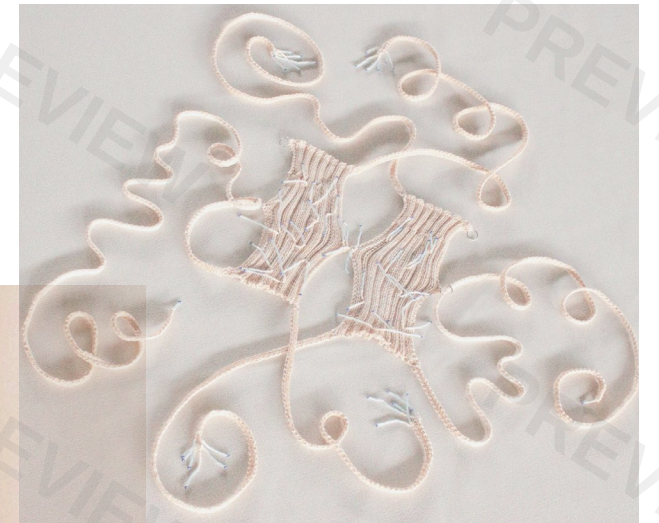




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My first question was honestly, what do you think was the catalyst that got you into design specifically in the first place? And if sustainability was a fundamental aspect of this from when you first decided to start designing things.

Yeah, so I started studying graphic design and then I worked in graphic design and art direction for fashion brands like Balenciaga, Carven, and different brands in Paris. It just felt like I was completely disconnected. I was always on a computer. I felt like I don't want to spend my whole life in the office in front of the computer. Even though sometimes there's a photoshoot or whatever, it's still a lot of office stuff. I wanted to switch towards textiles, from graphic design, because my dream was to make carpets. When I was a graphic designer, I graduated with a project that included printing towels. I was already interested in prints, which can easily transition from a poster to a carpet. When I started studying textiles, that's when sustainability really came into play. I didn't study fashion, so it was really textile-focused, learning how to weave, knit, and dye. When you think of all these things, sustainability quickly becomes part of the equation because the production of textiles, in general, is destructive. Design was always part of my interest, but sustainability became a major focus when I understood all the problems associated with creating fashion today.

So I think people who have more practical fashion education, like my master's in art and design culture, approach design more theoretically. We're removed from textiles and materials, and a lot of what we do ties back into the design process academically. Having a foundation of working with materials directly helps you see a fuller picture of how things are produced, compared to the notion of just sketching a dress without thinking about how to get that material to exist.

Right, you have such a widened perspective.

Yeah, exactly. That's probably something we really work with as textile designers. You're really aware of what the material is made of, where those fibers come from, and where it's going. So you're much more aware of the whole process. Fashion designers come much later and take a fabric that's already existing, most likely. That's a bit of the difference.

Is there a specific shoot or a way that you've ever presented your work that you feel like you're most proud of? Just on a personal level, not in terms of the size or reach, but something that you helped put together or something that your work was featured in that you feel very proud of having your work associated with.

There's one thing that comes to mind. Now I do everything myself—most of the print, the clothing, the sourcing of the material, the designing, and the photos. So it's a tremendous amount of work, and I have to work pretty quickly at times. I tend to get frustrated because I know I could take exciting photos, but doing everything takes a lot of energy and time. I feel like I'm not using my full potential because of timing, therefore I've learned to delegate more. But anyways, In the end, my favorite project happened intuitively without any planning. I live with a lot of artists, and a few of my roommates are writers and poets. They were doing this erotic poetry night at Kanaal 40 in the center of Amsterdam. I suggested they wear my clothes because it fits the theme, and it felt like a great community-based project.

Yeah, we definitely understand. TFB magazine is all about the creative community and uplifting all types of creatives. I think it's nice because on Instagram and stuff, you do an amazing shoot and spend so much time on it, but at the end of the day, does it really have a lot of weight? It's just an image that you pass by. To see your work as a living component within a different context, where there are people interacting with it, adds more depth.

Is there a specific concept within the design process or something else that you've worked with that you really enjoyed or that you would want to expand upon further? Do you have a concept that you've worked with a lot within your pieces?

For internal inspirations, I always come back to dried flowers, not only for the color choices but also for the textures. I collect a lot of items and seeds, and sometimes I get inspired by their textures. My process is slow, and I observe simple things. It's always hard to say what is what. I collect a seed and a piece of glass, and together, I feel like this would be an interesting texture. I think there's beauty in being slow because you can pay attention to things that people running around don't have time to look at.

I also wanted to touch on the versatility of your pieces and the gender fluidity of the silhouettes. Seeing as the pieces aren't binary, how would you describe the energy of the customer you envision buying or wearing your pieces?

I rarely do that, but depending on the energy I get from the clothes, I imagine random characters wearing them. Recently, I made one with a big collar, and it depends on the clothes. Many of my clothes feel quite sexy because the machines are hard to work with, and production is slow. I tend to do tiny things, attach together, and play with textures. The sexiness of things was not intentional, but the result of the production process.

Sexy against its own will.

Exactly. Sometimes I imagine really random characters wearing the clothes just to help me imagine them in the world. Otherwise, I rarely think of it in a very precise way. I would like to always include my work in a broader context than just on a white background. It's always part of the deal, but I'm always trying to create worlds around my work to contextualize it in an interesting way.

One thing that really jumps out to me is the consistency of the quality within everything you put out, like the garments, but also your Instagram and the imagery that you use to present your pieces. How do you see successfully showcasing this more professional aspect of your brand? Is it informed by your previous jobs and work experience, or is there an idea of yourself that you're trying to get through via the way you present your brand?

I was thinking about this a lot—how to present things. Now I'm doing things the way I know how to make them, even though sometimes I wish I could be even more direct. I do enjoy brands that have a simpler, more direct approach for example, phone photos against a barely lit white wall. I guess this trashier photo style is also a trend, and I like the experimental feeling it gives. But I always end up taking more "proper" photos in a certain way. Sometimes I would love to stick to the simple, but I always add more and more. I guess I do want to give this image of something well-made. If you want to do that, sometimes you have to accept that people see things well-made that are also well-presented. I take so much time and effort making the knitwear and I want to also take the time to photograph it properly.

When you're not a simple person, it's maybe not as easy to create simple things.

Yeah, I think some people do it super well. I want to distance myself from things that look too student-y. I've done the student-y thing in the past, and now I want to be a bit more...Refined.

You've created a huge range of items aside from the knitwear pieces, like tops, bottoms, dresses, and also jewelry pieces. Are there any other kinds of pieces that you're mentally playing around with creating?

It's always very random in my creative process. I collect bits and pieces from my life and I throw them together in the atelier, see what happens. For example I went to Mevius, a warehouse, and found a big bag full of beads made in Japan. Some looked like tiny grapes so I started making earrings randomly, then I started embroidering the tops with the same beads, then suddenly everything had beads. I did a lot with mixing knitwear and jewelry. My roommate, Alex Gasparis, makes silver jewelry, which I've used to link parts of my knitwear together. We thought it was interesting because suddenly you have pieces of jewelry where you never had any before, like on your thighs or ribs. I live in an artist community so they also influence my creative process. When a new roommate comes in, depending on what they do, you might have a cobbler come in, and you'll start making shoes... But even without the inputs from the roommates, it's really easy to go crazy in the world of textiles, there are so many techniques and structures that I want to explore. Sometimes I worked on ideas for carpets which then influenced my ideas for garments.. Basically I have so many random ideas ready to go.

That's great to hear!



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