

Top 10 Green Revolutionary Labels You Should Be Wearing!

Being stylish and eco-friendly is getting easier than ever, says author and Planet Green contributor



Summer Rayne Oakes. Find out who tops her list of must-wear labels.

By [Summer Rayne Oakes](#)

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I'm two months into my book tour with [Style, Naturally](#) and I've been able to connect and re-connect with some amazing operations that have been revolutionizing how we think about what we wear. So many of these people listed below (and many more that are not listed) made [Style, Naturally](#) possible because I'll tell you what: This stuff wasn't *nearly* as interesting seven, eight, nine years ago. (Thank you fashion-forward freethinkers!!) And the best news is still yet to come: Most of the jobs within this space *haven't even been invented yet*. I see so much more potential for growth and invention, so despite the [down-beat economy](#), there is a lot of room for entrepreneurship- both on a for-profit and non-profit level. The book tour is a good excuse to head to different countries and cities to see first-hand what cool work is cropping up—and I'm sure by the end of July (when the official tour ends), I'll have at least ten more great organizations and operations to give a shout out to. Check out my picks here, and, if you have any cool suggestions about you like to wear, leave them in the comments below.

1. The Maverick: People Tree Foundation

I met Safia Minney, founder of [People Tree](#) in December 2005 during our involvement at the Fair Trade Expo at the World Trade Organization, which was designed to inform trade ministers on [Free Trade](#) vs. [Fair Trade](#). What can I say, her spunk and her direction immediately impressed me. [People Tree](#), the foremost label defining fair-trade fashion, has just launched [The People Tree Foundation](#) the day after London Fashion Week, which happened to be the beginning of Fairtrade Fortnight in the UK. Since 1991, Safia has been working with various groups around the world to not only build an incredible fashion label, but also to help train artisans, build schools, and help cotton growers transition from conventional to organic farming methods.

As a newly-anointed [People Tree Foundation](#) ambassador, I discussed with Safia what she'd like to accomplish with the organization. She sees the nascent organization working in tandem with the [People Tree](#) brand, to help scale up training, technical support, sustainable community development and environmental initiatives. This should allow the brand to strengthen and expand while simultaneously bringing in new resources and donations to sustainable development projects in the Swallows and Artisan Hut (Bangladesh) and Sasha and Tara Projects (India). Stay tuned for future adventures with Safia. I've been threatening to plan an excursion to her project sites for some time! Maybe this year is the year. But if not, you can tune into her work on her [blog here](#).

2. The Cool Kid: School House

I spoke with Rachel Weeks what seems like eons ago in regards to her "ethically-sourced collegiate apparel company" idea and was so thrilled to hear she launched it with flying colors—or should I say with Blue and Silver with the Duke University Blue Devils! Rachel spent a year after her graduation from the school researching socially-responsible apparel manufacturing initiatives in Sri Lanka, and, with the help of various mentors and a long-winding road of challenges and new findings, her label is totally up and running. The factory workers who produce [School House](#) is earning 2-3 times more than what factory workers down the road are earning. Additionally, the School House factory is independently monitored by [Oxfam Australia](#) Apparel Industry Labour Rights Movement (ALaRM). School House will be rolling out to various other North Carolina schools as well as select schools in the Northeast. Feeling a little left out? Well tell your alma mater to hop on it!

3. The Future Force: Made-by

I first wrote about [MADE-BY](#) way [back in 2005](#), shortly after they launched the "umbrella label" to help brands map, gauge, improve and communicate sustainability and transparency along their supply chains. The organization was set up in 2004 by Solidaridad, a Dutch NGO, and just launched this year in the U.K. during [London Fashion Week](#). It was awesome to connect with everyone, including Tim Wilson, founder of Historic Futures, who works closely with [MADE-BY](#). I was happy to see that

he still remembered our interview. "I said back in 2005 that transparency is the way of the future," he said, smiling, "and I still say that transparency is the way of the future." MADE-BY now has over thirty companies using its system.

4. The Newcomer: Payless ShoeSource

[Chalk one up for Payless](#) who figured out how to democratize green in the footwear space in the new zoe & zac line launching this April, and which has been an exciting project for me personally to work on. The line initially will include sneakers, ballet flats, wedges, and sandals made from [organic cotton](#), hemp, linen, recycled rubber, non-PVC foam beds, recycled PET, and water-based glues—and no doubt they will quickly evolve and grow in forthcoming seasons. We've been looking for easy ways for Payless customers to get involved in going green, but also something that will help them make a meaningful impact, so I'm happy to announce that Payless will also be pushing one more step forward by teaming up soon with a non-profit partner. We'll be announcing that partnership on April 13 so check this space!

5. The Dark Horse: Environmental Justice Foundation

The members of the [EJF](#) take on some pretty serious issues, from forced child labor to pesticides, but they send their message in a gentler way: through exclusive designer T-shirts from people such as John Rocha and Allegra Hicks. I bumped into the peeps first at [Designers & Agents Green Room](#) and later at [Esthetica at London Fashion Week](#). Check out some of their tees and their work, because these people definitely know how to team up with the right people to get their conscious swerve on.

6. The Sleeper: XS Project

I first spoke with Ann Wizer back in 2005 after a television program we were doing in Singapore. Her non-profit, [XS Project](#), creates high quality goods out of the massive trash heaps that get dumped on Jakarta, Indonesia every day. The [XSOutreach Program](#) is designed to provide fundraising opportunities for schools, PTAs and environmental organizations. All of the products—from wallets to "trash" bins (how ironic!) to bags—can be purchased and resold. The whole model supports XSPROJECT Foundation and trash pickers in Indonesia, as well as the organization of your choice. Think about it: It's so much better than trying to sell those candy bars.

7. The Stalwart: Goodwill

[Goodwill](#) is North America's leading nonprofit provider of education, training, and career services for people with disadvantages. Last year alone, local Goodwills collectively provided employment and training services for more than 1.1 million individuals. I recently met a young woman who works with Goodwill, and said she was happy to hear me mention them in one of my talks because she feels so strongly about the work that they've put forth. After all, the clothing that you donate to Goodwill is sold in more than 2,200 retail stores and on their [internet auction site](#). Revenues go back to fund job training and other services. More than 84% of Goodwill's total revenues are used to fund education and career services, and other critical community programs.

8. The Risk-Taker: Fashion Fights Poverty

D.C. is known more for it's politics than it is for fashion, but that doesn't mean there isn't room for a little FFP (Fashion Fights Poverty) <http://www.fashionfightspoverty.org>. My friend Jake introduced me to the people at this organization, but it wasn't until this past March at a [Style, Naturally launch in our nation's capitol](#) that I got to meet Yvette Castro and hear what they're all about. First and foremost, FFP rewards and recognizes designers and organizations who embrace the powerful potential of creativity and design to address issues of poverty. Secondly, it is about showing choices of responsible consumerism. Really what they'd like to do is go over the heads of all the bureaucratic think tanks and policy makers and get both producer and consumer participating in the process. Not a bad idea.

9. The Recycler: Wearable Collections

Based out of NYC, [Wearable Collections](#) puts bins inside buildings to make it easy for people to recycle clothes. (Up to 5% of our municipal waste is comprised of apparel!) They have now expanded into colleges with the College Clothing Collection Challenge and listen up students, because this is about you too! Leaders in clubs, sports teams, or fraternities and sororities can ring up WC and get a bin on their campus. You'd handle all the promotions and collections and Wearable Collections will be able to dedicate 20% of the gross revenues back to the prospective club or host. A successful clothing drive could result in \$1,000-\$2,000 for the respective organization. And think about collecting during graduation. I know I didn't want to schlep all of my clothes back to a [tiny NYC apartment](#), so check it out.

10. The Hipster: Friends of TOMS

Blake Mycoskie and his friends over at [TOMS](#) are all about the One-for-One deal. Haven't heard of it? Well, for every pair of shoes you buy, TOMS gives a pair to children in need. I've done two shoe drop missions with them—one in South Africa and one in Mexico—and they sure won't be my last. [Friends of TOMS](#) is their charitable arm of the company that allows you to volunteer, experience and give to the One-for-One mission. This coming year they want to help eradicate pododermatitis, a debilitating disease from certain soil types causing infections in the foot which results in extreme swelling, ulcerations and deformities. The disease actually happens to be preventable with clean water and shoes, so stay tuned for new developments on that front.

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