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Swapping and Swishing and the new Eco-Fabulousness

Ethical and eco shopping is a trend that is here to stay, but the problem is that it is increasingly becoming a way of showing how well off you are rather than a show of real commitment to a new lifestyle. Green-gadgets, eco-junk and ethical-overdosing are all symptoms of the consumerisation of our conscience. Sheherazade Goldsmith, author of "A Slice of Organic Life" says "being more conscious isn't about giving things up". Like many fashion-conscious and trendy eco-advisors she advises us to buy local produce, buy sustainable products, but nowhere does she recommend to simply buy less.

This is however where some say that the trend for swapping and "swishing" can offer a real alternative for the design and fashion conscious Londoners whose carbon footprint is a close reflection of their credit card spending. Swishing is the name for designer clothing and accessory swap parties organised by Futerra, a "sustainability communications agency" who help to improve companies' green credentials. The "ecofabulous" parties are aimed, says organiser Lucy Shea, at women in their 20s and 30s who "are passionately committed to saving the planet, but don't want to do it in bad clothes."

One of the other popular swap schemes at the moment is called Visa Swap, and is an apparently curious collaboration between the credit card company Visa and TRIAD (Textile Recycling for Aid and International Development). Visa Swap works like this: swappers are given a location around central London where they can drop off unwanted but fashionable clothes in good condition. The items are valued, and according to how much they are worth the swapper is given points on a special Visa Swap "credit card". Two weeks later the "swap shop" at a pop-up store is opened and the swappers can come back to spend their points in a beautifully designed boutique environment (i.e. far from the flea market image of second hand clothes). No money is exchanged and the scheme has received much publicity and popularity thanks not only to its green credentials but also to the donations of shoes and handbags from several fashion icons and celebrities such as Mischa Barton and Saffron Burrows.

On-line swapping is also taking off with sites such as www.whatsmineisyours.com set up by fashion expert Judy Berger to encourage eco-friendly swapping of quality and vintage clothing, accessories and even furniture. Each swap costs only 4€, and it is free to register.

Where once your second hand clothes were simply second hand used items which would end up at a flea market, they are now cleverly upgraded to eco-friendly vintage items. Another scheme is that by the organisation Hybrid, which calls its swaps “Feather Duster” and combines “guilt-free fast fashion with female networking”.

Another interesting development in the swapping scene is the involvement of normal fashion retailers. Topshop, which knows a trend when it sees one, has also climbed on the bandwagon. Normally in the press for things such as the sought-after Kate Moss collection, they recently were noted for their charity fashion sales that took place around the UK. Not only did they improve their green credentials by discouraging people from just throwing their old clothes away, but raised money for victims of domestic violence.

There is naturally a lot of criticism from eco-purists of such schemes, but as one person involved in Visa Swap said, “If this swap stops someone, somewhere along the line, buying something they don’t need, then that’s got to be a good thing.”

www.whatsmineisyours.com