ON THE BEAT

Green Light

Taking the first step toward shopping with sustainability in mind might be daunting, but these 63 brands make it easy to go green.

BY ROBYN SMITH

Navigating the nuances of so-called green products can be an intimidating task. First, there’s the sheer volume of goods making green claims—but just because it’s got a recycled-looking brown tag or is labeled “organic,” is it really sustainable? What do all of the stamps and certifications really mean? How much will your clients expect you to know about each product’s provenance if you’re touting its eco-conscious bona fides? And if something is made with recycled water bottles, how nice can it really be?

A few simple directives can simplify your shopping experience: Buy intentionally, get to know the brand you’re buying from, and shop with your values at the forefront.

“Look at the DNA of the business itself rather than the words that describe the product,” advises Erinch Sahan, chief executive of the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO). “A mainstream brand can have one product that got a certification or one ingredient in one product that got a certification, but we need to ask about the business itself.”

How to sniff out the truly meaningful initiatives? Sahan suggests a few cursory questions: Does the company prioritize looking after the best interests of the people who make its products? How is its supply chain structured, and what is its actual impact? (Have they made sure that the people who make up the supply chain are treated well from start to finish? Do they get paid enough to live and work with basic human dignity?)

The tough questions matter: Especially as sustainability has become trendy, a suite of would-be do-gooders have sprung up with big claims and little to back them up. “Brands on the more authentic end of the spectrum will always have to contend with greenwashing by some mainstream brands, because [as soon as] we come up with a description of who we are, someone will try to co-opt our language,” he says.

Sahan’s focus is on what he calls “mission-led enterprises,” or companies that ethically support the people who power every step of a brand’s supply chain, but there are many ways to approach sustainable shopping. Even at the most fastidious companies, it’s extremely rare to be completely sustainable, so a good strategy is to shop with the values that are most meaningful to you and your clients in mind. “There’s never a silver bullet solution,” says Elizabeth Segran, who writes about eco-conscious fashion for Fast Company. “I’m always thinking about beautiful things and materialism, and with my readers, I’m promoting consumption. But on the other hand, I think about the impact. If I need to buy something, the best thing to do is to buy something durable, well-made and as ethical as possible.”

Segran chooses to focus on the positives of rampant greenwashing: “The environmental crisis we’re in is complex and multifarious. A lot of founders of companies are also learning about this as they go along, and they’re making the best decisions they can,” she says. “It shows they’re responding to the trend, and hopefully that means things are moving in the right direction.”

IF YOU CARE ABOUT:
Transparent Sourcing

These brands raise the bar on material provenance, from cotton fiber DNA testing and rapid tree replacement to resourceful repurposing of scrap metal, invasive plants, and more.

Bloomist

The new, hyper-targeted e-commerce site carries artisan-made decor inspired by the natural world, like the Beach match striker, which is made of stones collected along the New England coast.

Flaneur

The bedding brand hires a third party to do DNA testing on its fibers to ensure that each of its products, like the Tricolor Tie-Dye collection, is made of 100 percent U.S.-grown Supima cotton.

Skylar Morgan

Regional lumberyards and land plots razed for construction in the Atlanta area provide reclaimed Louisiana sinker cypress—which would otherwise be discarded—for the company’s Hillock armoire.
Renewable materials are a hallmark of the brand’s sourcing, including water hyacinth for its Junsei Colourweave shades.

With its new Organics collection, the company’s wallcoverings are printed on PVC-free vinyl and LEED-certified paper made of natural fibers and recycled content.

The brand’s European white oak flooring is all certified through the Forest Stewardship Council.

The rug brand sources wool for products like its Agata carpet from New Zealand sheep raised at high altitudes on a diet of nutrient-rich vegetation, resulting in softer, stronger fiber.

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The San Francisco artisan assembles raw materials from flea markets, lumberyards and scrap-metal yards into her collection of household tools (like this broom) in her 300-square-foot studio.

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The Pow! ottoman is upholstered in high-performance Ultrasuede fabric, the first nonwoven suede made of partially plant-based polyester, which is derived from sugarcane in India.

The brand’s furniture, including the Sitka dining table, is made of rapidly renewable moso bamboo gathered and manufactured in northern China.

The natural pole rattan used to make the company’s Hammond lounge chair is harvested from routinely reforested vines.

The brand’s Indiana chaise lounge features timber that’s immediately reforested in Brazil.
**DESIGN DISPATCH**

**Photography:** Courtesy of Brands

1. **The Charleston, South Carolina–based manufacturer of made-to-order lighting like Cubism invests in employee amenities, apprenticeships and education.**

   Founders Lawson Ricketts and Nick Geimer visit with their manufacturing partners in Africa about four times per year. (The pair, having lived in South Africa for a decade, are close to many of their partners’ families, as well.) The Nama side table is made with ostrich eggshells, a byproduct of the local food industry.

2. **Materials for the Jujuy rug are sourced from an Argentinian women’s cooperative that raises sheep, then shears and hand-spins their wool. (The sheep are given nicknames according to their coloring: hormiga, meaning bee, when they are multicolored; chola when they are white; and choco when they are brown.) The co-op is one of many artisan groups the New York design studio collaborates with; another, in Bolivia, creates Arbol lamps from salvaged tropical hardwood.**

3. **The textiles house works closely with accredited mills in Europe to make its fabrics, including the silk velvet and linen of this Flange cushion.**

**IF YOU CARE ABOUT:**

**Ethical Manufacturing**

These brands cultivate exceptional relationships with their partners and maintain ethical manufacturing and workplace practices through every step of the supply chain. In short, every worker is treated well.

- **GlobelIn**
  - The subscription box company sources handmade objects—like the Moroccan plate and Malika mug—from fair trade vendors around the globe.

- **Tai Ping**
  - Protected by fair pay and safe conditions, Chinese artisans make the hand-tufted Apogean rug in state-of-the-art workshops.

- **Ducduc**
  - Crafted in the children’s furniture company’s restored 1890s production facility in Connecticut, the Regency bunk bed—and all of the brand’s catalog—is made to order by master builders in a safe, clean work environment in an area of high unemployment.

- **54kibo**
  - The contemporary African design destination’s hand-carved Djembe side table is sourced from the family-run Tekura Studio and crafted by a small group of skilled artisans in Ghana with a WFTO membership in process.

- **L’Aviva Home**
  - The brand’s jute rugs are made in partnership with GoodWeave, a network of nonprofit organizations dedicated to preventing child labor in the rug industry.

- **Boll & Branch**
  - The online retailer has invested in organic cotton farms and fair trade factories in India to make luxury bedding like these striped linen sheets.

- **The Urban Electric Co.**
  - The Charleston, South Carolina-based manufacturer of made-to-order lighting like Cubism invests in employee amenities, apprenticeships and education.

- **Ngala Trading**
  - Founders Lawson Ricketts and Nick Geimer visit with their manufacturing partners in Africa about four times per year. (The pair, having lived in South Africa for a decade, are close to many of their partners’ families, as well.) The Nama side table is made with ostrich eggshells, a byproduct of the local food industry.
It takes 60,000 gallons of water a day to make pieces like the Euclid collection—but it’s all reused, thanks to a proprietary system that collects rainfall and filters up to 200 gallons per minute.

The Chicago firm contracts with horticulturists and engineers around the globe to install living walls, which are planted in Biotiles, patented tiles that use Rockwool (fibers created by combining rock and chalk at high heat) instead of soil.

The French outdoor furniture manufacturer makes the Adada rocking horse from leftover parts from the manufacturing process of its other lines.

Last year, the lighting company planted more than 100 trees in a creek near its manufacturing facility in Laguna Beach, California, with the aim of reducing the runoff that reaches the beach. Unused material from products like the Nauta table lamp are repurposed or recycled.

To make products like the Charles dresser, the manufacturer operates a solar field on its factory grounds that produces more than 800,000 kilowatt hours of power annually—roughly two-thirds of its power consumption.
The Florida-based company has furnished 32 residences for Give Kids the World Village, a local nonprofit for children with life-threatening illnesses. It has also donated nearly $500,000 worth of its furniture, like its Occasional chair, to communities affected by hurricanes.

One percent of the textile studio’s total sales, including from the Belize Blooms pillow, is contributed to nonprofits like Vital Action Project that help protect the environment.

The Chicago-based upholstery company, the manufacturer behind quick-ship brand Cloth & Company’s Josephine Fringe chair, has been involved with charities like City of Hope and Chicago Lighthouse for more than 70 years. The company also provides free ESL and GED classes while employees are on the clock.

The nonprofit recycles entire luxury kitchens by installing them in homes across the U.S. Part of its proceeds support Designs for Dignity, which renovates spaces for other nonprofits. Since its launch in 2005, it has recycled more than 5,000 kitchens, diverting over 30 million pounds from landfills.
Repurposed surfaces are standard fare for the Philadelphia-based manufacturer, which counts old paving stones, school chalkboards, marble shower stall dividers and factory machine bases among the materials it upcycles for its custom furniture.

Post-production paper chips from solid colorways—which would otherwise have gone to waste—comprise 30 percent of the brand’s Paper Terrazzo sheet laminate.

Hammered copper products like the Cozumel vanity top are made from recycled copper (mostly engine coils) sourced and constructed in central Mexico, where the craft has deep roots.

Because the glass used to make solar panels needs to be of incredibly high quality, much is discarded. Tala has repurposed the rejected glass into Glaskeramik, a new material that is the foundation of its Magma collection.

For its Ocean collection, the Copenhagen-based brand reenvisioned a 1955 design as outdoor furniture, manufactured entirely from ocean waste like recycled fishing nets. In some cases, the company even pays Danish fishing operations to recycle their used nets rather than abandoning them at sea.

The shapes that adorn the Graphic sideboard’s doors are composed of leftover wood scrap from the company’s factory, which would otherwise be too small for furniture.

Sales of pillows produced from remnant fabrics, used to train the e-tailer’s new stitchers, go to a New York arts nonprofit.

These brands transform previously used materials—think engine coils, fishing nets and chalkboards—to construct new, beautiful objects for the home.
The modular Sactional sofa’s upholstery is made from recycled plastic bottles; cushions are filled with shredded scrap foam from the sofa industry.

The brand uses recycled plastic—the Raleigh and Highland pillows are made entirely of recycled polyester—in its indoor/outdoor collections.

The Crackle collection by Kohler WasteLAB is made of unfired clay culled from Kohler’s Wisconsin factory, turning the waste into a reusable material.

The Swedish brand’s Scrap CMYK curtains are made of recycled polyester from used plastic bottles.

The fill of the Cloud comforter is made of recycled polyester. Since 2017, the brand has recycled more than 7 million plastic bottles.

Reused scraps from the Danish textile brand’s yarn spinners in the U.K. are reformulated to create its Re-wool collection, which includes 21 colorways and is made with 45 percent recycled wool.

Since 2012, the brand’s Tile Take-Back program has turned 130 million pounds of post-consumer porcelain (think: toilets) into pieces like its Reformation tile.

The brand uses organic Guatemalan wool sourced in Quetzaltenango for its Area rug; it also recycles post-consumer bottles into glassware.

The Brooklyn-based design collective, formed by recent Rhode Island School of Design alumni, makes its Amber lighting using pulled roving (unspun wool) and upcycled fabrics—anything from blue jeans to industry scraps.

Recycled tire rubber and salvaged marble from across the U.S. are combined to create the Coexist standing mirror.

The Swedish brand’s Scrap CMYK curtains are made of recycled polyester from used plastic bottles.