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FASHION

Lessons in Sustainability from WHITE Milano

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Words by ROBERT QUICK

Sustainability continues to take center stage at the annual [WHITE Milano](https://www.whiteshow.it/) trade show in Milan.

Ahead of the next conference happening this weekend, we caught up co-founder and CEO Brenda Bellei Bizzi on how different fashion designers can implement sustainable practices into their production methods and which brands are already leading the way.

EH: Let's start talking about sustainability. It seems like this is one of the main features of White this year.

BBB: Sustainability has been our concept since the beginning. Even in the décor aspect, we've always used materials like recycled wood, for example. Our brands are small and medium family-owned companies, most of which are sustainable as well. For the next edition, we decided to launch an inquiry to all the brands at White. They had to fill out a form where they had to explain what they are doing in terms of sustainability, and what they were doing to improve from a material and production standpoint. I am sure that each one of them has many things to say because each company has a rich heritage. I am sure that most of them are doing their best in this field because now it's not a trend anymore, it's a necessary step. Fashion is one of the first industries in the world to emphasize the importance of sustainability.

EH: Have you been assisting in the increase of the numbers of vendors that you showcase in terms of sustainability recently? Did they respond to the concept more and more by providing sustainable pieces to showcase at the trade show?

BBB: Yes. Many exhibitors present special capsule collections not only made with sustainable fibers but are also sustainable during the production process as well. Sustainability is not only about the material but also about the recycling process and other production aspects. Some brands are investing in "good economy". For example, Timberland is investing in creating a new platform for green sustainability in the world. Each brand has a different approach.



EH. What are some of the things you've seen from newer brands that are just starting out, and how are they implementing their own business strategies?

BBB: We have a very nice example. The name is WRAD, founded by Matteo Ward. He is a very smart entrepreneur. He is managing his own line that is totally sustainable. He is doing a special t-shirt and pant line, a special collection that uses graphite to paint his clothes. He is now very popular in Italy. He is now doing very nice collaborations, like the one with Starbucks. He is growing a lot. He created a special trademark for this kind of painting. All the big companies now are going to him to buy his graphite colored fabrics. He is a consultant for major maisons. He is a trendsetter. This is an example of success in this field. Right now for a young brand, it's very difficult to stay on the market. {RQ: There are so many, everyday}. He is the coolest designer in this field. Matteo uses his ideas to manage very strong communication. His brand is selling a lot. He is not only selling the product but also the idea behind it. He is our guest star in our operation.



Image: Davide Carson.

EH: It's cool that you mentioned how WRAD is using graphite to paint clothes – why do you think more people know about these labels?

BBB: All the big companies are trying to find a new way to communicate. Many of them are creating a bridge between themselves and schools, not just the fashion schools but also universities, because they want to reach out to a younger generation. This is the main characteristic of the way companies have recently embraced communication. A lot are asking us to create this connection between the schools. Also, many brands are trying to improve their digital channels by involving press and influencers to convey their message and reach the final consumer. WHITE Milano, on the other end, is a particular island in this world. People approaching our platforms are finding a new way to stay in the business. When a brand approaches our platform it's because they usually want to find a new way to communicate and reach to the public.

EH: How do you find new brands?

BBB: We have some brands that have been with us since the beginning. When they decide to change their strategy, perhaps they open their showroom or develop the business in another way. But I think that most of them have a very good relationship with us. We like to stay close to them because many times they come back when they have a new project to introduce on the market. We do discover new brands but also have established brands that decide to approach our platform because they have a new line, for example. I think the relationship between our platform and the brands and their followers is one of the strongest components of our show.

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