

DESIGN NEW FABRICS

# Fashion conscious find conscience

Hi-tech fabrics from recycled fishing lines, plastic bottles and even bamboo promise to feel good as well as be good for the environment, writes **Helen Hawkes**.

If you're still wearing fashion garments made from traditional cotton, or even heavyweight wool, it's time to update your wardrobe.

In line with international trends, the must-have fabrics revolutionising the clothing industry are green-leaning or well-being orientated, as well as hi-tech versions of old favourites.

When Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) opened its suitcase at Spin Expo in Shanghai in September, it contained some surprising and innovative technologies.

Among them was its Merino Touch collection that features garments that are, simply, softer to touch and more luxurious against the skin. "Fashion today is not only about appearance; it's also

about how the wearer feels," says AWI chief executive Craig Welsh. He believes there is new demand for products that are not only more wearable but provide well-being effects. Hence the new range of Australian merino wool products featuring substances such as aloe-vera, vitamin E and lavender, micro-encapsulated and bound to the fabric during the spinning process and slowly released during wear. There is also Berle's lightweight Shapetech fabric, made of nylon elastane, that smoothes without corset-like restrictions.

Elsewhere America's Nano-Tex, has developed for Reebok scented seamless bra tops, which offer a peppermint scent as the wearer begins to generate heat during exercise.



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The US company has also perfected processes that make traditional cotton and silk fabrics more wearable and durable, such as wrinkle-free sport shirts and spill-resistant Brooks Brothers 100 per cent silk ties. No more business lunch stains.

But AWI isn't to be outdone. Its new MerinoFresh technology allows wearers to clean woven products including suits, trousers and skirts, in the shower. The



Fashion from Australian Wool Innovation, left and above. Photo courtesy AWI

garments can then be drip-dried and, as long as they are hung carefully, no ironing is required. The technology, currently being transferred to companies in Asia and Europe, requires stabilisation of the base fabric to avoid shrinkage.

Meanwhile, in Japan, another old favourite has been revived. Technology innovators Toray have developed a polyester nylon that feels like washed silk taffeta.

However, nylon and polyester remain very sensitive to the price of oil, says Stanley Fergusson, a lecturer in textiles at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

To this end, and perhaps to satisfy environmental demands, Toray is also developing a **Continued next page**

From previous page polyester blend that includes a hero of the green fabric trend, bamboo. French knit and jersey specialist Guigou is also working on a bamboo yarn blend.

"It's really just a new viscose," says Guigou company representative Virginie Gliozzo. "The resulting fabric feels like cotton, but it's a bit more voluptuous. And it's easy-care."

Bamboo, with its soft, silky feel and easy application to fashion clothing, is definitely the raw material making its mark on the fast-growing eco side of the fashion industry, says Fergusson.

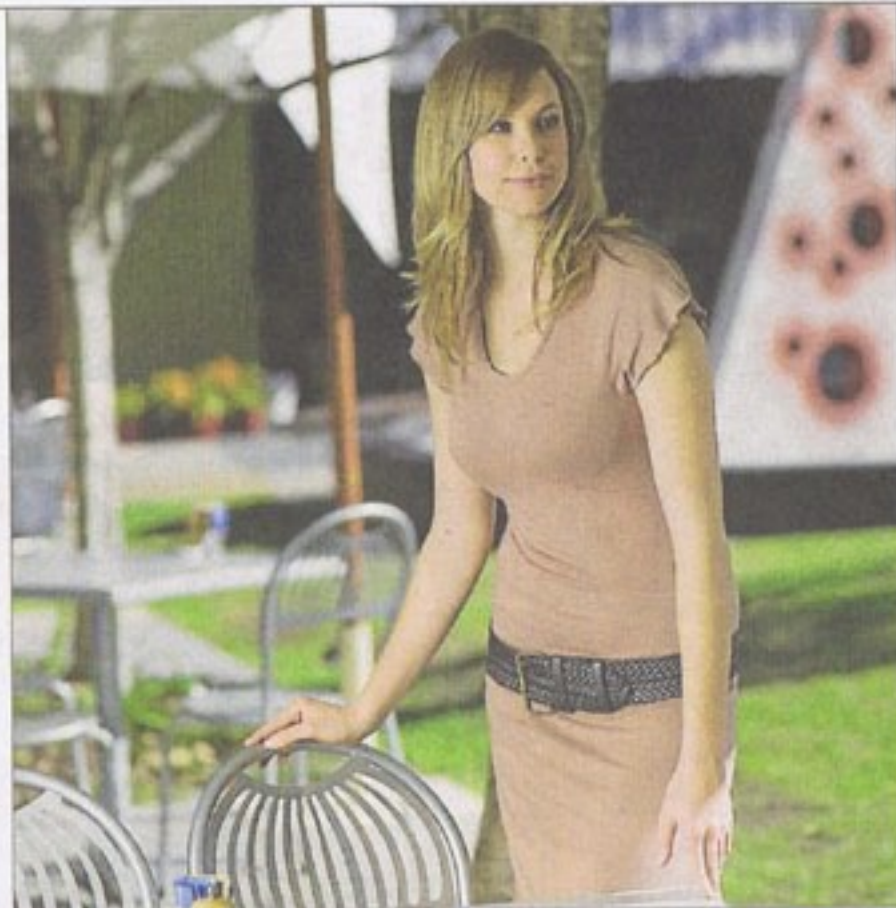
The bamboo plant grows quickly, without chemicals, sucks up a lot of carbon dioxide, releases more oxygen than trees, and is easy on water resources.

It is also hypo-allergenic, biodegradable, breathes more easily than cotton, has natural anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties and is UV protective – the ultimate 21st century fabric, really.

Yet Amanda and Elouise Naess, who created the very successful Bamboo Body fashion company 2½ years ago say it is bamboo's soft feel and beautiful drape that is just as important to fashionistas as its eco credentials.

"We wanted people to wear our clothing not only because it is sustainable, but because it is classically designed, flattering and beautiful," they say.

It's an outdated idea that when



fabrics go green, contemporary design goes out the window.

So says fashion designer Lisa Gorman, whose Gorman Organic range, which has been in shops for 18 months, is now requested by her regular fashion customers.

"It's not just a question of it being available," she says. "People are seeking it out."

Forget the old hemp shirts that felt like hair shirts, or daggy cotton pants and loose-fitting tops of yesterday's alternative movement.

Certainly you can still find these in some hippy-dippy residential communities.

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Creation from eco-fashion label Bamboo Body (far left), and organic T-shirts from Gorman Organics. Photos courtesy Bamboo Body, Gorman Organics

Gorman uses an organic cotton and silk blend, grown in India (and not bleached) to create high-fashion garments. She's also experimented with natural dyes but says the results were not up to commercial standard, so her factories have an environmentally friendly dye disposal process.

Kelli Donovan, one of the creative forces behind Pure Pod is also concerned about creating ethical and commercial clothing that is "stylish, with an urban influence".

"Pure Pod is worn by people who normally wouldn't even consider the environment when they purchase goods," she says.

As well as bamboo, Donovan and partner Sean Watson, use organic cotton, wool, hemp, soy and silk in contemporary designs.

"We are always looking at new fabric suppliers and the quality is getting more green and better."

Whether it's the results that new, high-tech fabrics can achieve for wearers, or trendy greenies increasingly driving fashion

purchases, there's little doubt that the future lies with the new fabric stars. Even Bonds new Cottontails range is made with organic cotton.

After all, who really wants a wool dress or sweater that can only be dry-cleaned when a hassle-free version is as easy to purchase off the rack; or a shirt made of commercially grown cotton that comes with chemical by-products when an organic, hopefully non-bleached version, or its bamboo equivalent, is available to buy, even if it costs a little more?

If you really want something that is trendy, fashion orientated and even a talking point, what about a pair of board shorts that combines performance and eco awareness?

International brand Billabong is cleaning up the surf-wear market with its Platinum B9 wetsuits of which 90 per cent of the fabric is made from recycled polyester products such as old fishing nets and clothing. Its boardies are made from Eco-Supreme Suede, a recycled and recyclable pure polyester made from used textiles and plastic bottles.

A spokesman said the product, which still maintains a high level of comfort, durability and practicality, has been a best seller.