



# REFASHIONED

CUTTING-EDGE CLOTHING  
FROM UPCYCLED MATERIALS

SASS BROWN





During my years of working in the fashion industry,  
I have seen first-hand the effects of newer, faster and  
'better' ways of living and buying. Ultimately, choosing  
faster and cheaper can equate to unwitting disregard  
for humanity and the environment.

It is often much easier to consume what is convenient without thinking too much about the larger impact or consequences of our choices – particularly the continuing use of toxic chemicals, haphazard disposal of these wastes, unprotected workers and unsafe practices. These conditions simply cannot be sustained long-term if we are to continue living on this beautiful blue planet. As globalization makes our fashion production more and more transparent, we are no longer blind to manufacturing methods. As the processes become understood by the end consumer, customers begin to make different choices. Patti Smith once said, 'I choose Earth'. I see a future where we all choose Earth.

I applaud the work of Sass Brown and all the designers and innovators who are working toward that future. I believe that the greater 'machine' can be slowed and reined in, and that beautiful ways of working can grow from that restraint. Those outlined in this book are individuals and companies that make me hopeful and are making a difference in the world today. For instance, the work of MAYER Peace Collection includes handcrafted tailored jackets and coordinating separates made from antique fabrics, and perfectly illustrates the beauty that comes from upcycling

material. Piece x Piece offers a personal response to the overwhelming amount of waste produced by the fashion industry by using waste cuttings from other garment producers. What would traditionally be considered trash and would find its way to a landfill is now the basis of stunning limited-edition pieces of clothing. As I read through Sass's book, I clearly see beautiful new values emerging on every front.

My journey with textiles spans my entire life, beginning with memories of my grandmother's sewing circles during humid summers in northern Alabama. The magnificent quilts made then are now considered valuable treasures, but were commonplace and practical at the time. These women 'upcycled' out of necessity, using fabric taken from salvaged flour sacks and outgrown Sunday dresses that had seen their last wearing. While these seamstresses surely never used the words upcycled, recycled or sustainable design, their common-sense approach and practicality are characteristics we should emulate and applaud.

My experience of over a decade with my company Alabama Chanin tells me that recycling and repurposing textiles lends to the complexity, artistry and value of a finished design. As people, our many roles change and evolve over the course of a lifetime; I love the idea that textiles can do the same. Sass Brown's work proves that reviving something in order for it to serve a new purpose can be a beautiful act of conservation, design and art.

Natalie Chanin,  
Founder of Alabama Chanin

## FOREWORD



ALABAMA CHANIN'S CELEBRATION OF CRAFTSMANSHIP AND ARTISANSHIP IN EVERYDAY LIFE EXTENDS THROUGHOUT THE EXQUISITE COLLECTION, WHICH HONOURS THE CREATOR IN US ALL.



# MAYER PEACE COLLECTION

BERLIN-BASED LABEL  
MAYER PEACE COLLECTION,  
FOUNDED IN 2004, FUSES  
FASHION AND CHARITY,  
TRANSFORMING RECYCLED  
MATERIALS.



ABOVE: LINEN AND HEMP JACKET  
PRODUCED FROM VINTAGE GERMAN  
FLOUR SACKS AND FEATURING THE  
ORIGINAL GRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION  
OF THE FARM AND THE FARMER.

OPPOSITE: JACKET MADE ENTIRELY  
FROM UPCYCLED AND PATCHWORKED  
DENIM JEANS, INCLUDING POCKETS,  
TABS AND WAISTBANDS.







Growing up in the Black Forest in the south of Germany and playing games around the grain sacks from local mills in her grandfather's barn, founder Christine Mayer remains true to her origins. Working with antique flour sacks from the mid-1850s; folkloric cross-stitched embroidery patterns on striking white backgrounds with scarlet hand-stitched monograms reminiscent of country table linen; richly embellished and embroidered curtains; a mother's decorative armchair protector; a grandmother's delicate trousseau; and rough, hard-wearing handwoven linens and mattress ticking, Mayer beautifully handcrafts tailored jackets and coordinating separates. She relishes discovering new materials from traditional Bavarian farms and mills, antique dealers, flea markets and theatre inventory clearances, which inform each season's direction and signify a new and exciting challenge. Mayer sees her role much like that of a sculptor, establishing a form of communication between the material and the creator, and with a responsibility to set the material's story free and to extend its life, while letting her creativity run its course. Always fascinated by historic materials, Mayer also sources military textiles, such as marine bags and armed forces capes from across Europe.

Russian-army or Napoleonic-style military jackets are paired with Provençal-style tablecloth skirts or worn over urban khaki low-crotched and multi-patched-and-pocketed trousers with jackboots. Strict retro military-cut jackets feature sleeves crafted from humble milkmaid cross-stitched aprons and are worn with asymmetric tea-towel skirts. Patchworked recycled denim jeans, inventively reimagined from pieced waistbands, pockets and yokes, form entirely









THE ORNAMENTAL JACKET (OPPOSITE) FEATURES HEAVY DOMESTIC EMBROIDERY ON THE SLEEVES, WHILE THE UTILITARIAN STYLING OF THE BLOUSE AND SKIRT (BELOW) HAS SIMPLE CONTRASTING WOVEN EDGING.



new feminine pieces, strictly tailored jackets and slouchy low-slung trousers. Mayer takes wonderful advantage of the myriad shades in washed and worn denim to create variations in tone and colour within a single piece. The collection also incorporates combat military pieces with multiple pockets and tabs, bringing a decidedly urban feel to balance out the pretty white linen coordinates. With a focus on expressing contrast within her collections, Mayer merges robust looks, elaborate embroidery, feminine fits and exceptional cuts, forming a unique look and making a harmonious and poetic unity.

With a background in fur production, Mayer learned an appreciation of patching and cutting materials and piecing them back together through the complex process of slashing and re-sewing skins. Developed step by step according to Mayer's innate sense of where each piece belongs, each design is hand cut and placed, working directly on the mannequin. The highly decorative pieces are placed first, followed by the leftovers, all moulded into sharp cuts and feminine curves. The unique nature of each of the materials means that there are no actual patterns, while the individual moulding leads to a very feminine fit and line. Inspired by history, in particular nineteenth- and twentieth-century theatrical costumes, Mayer is also influenced by global patterns and embroideries.

A portion of profits from all MAYER Peace Collection designs benefits children's charity projects in Nepal and India. With a trace of spirituality woven in between the threads of the material, every garment provides strength and gives the wearer the impetus to move beyond her own horizons.





In a fast-fashion world of throw-away clothing, the 'upcycling' of recycled materials and discarded garments is the ultimate expression of the slow-fashion movement, with every piece individually conceived and crafted from scratch. This book showcases the work of 46 international designers currently working with materials in this way, reinvigorating them with new life and value. The result is beautiful and desirable clothing and accessories that also make an important statement to the fashion world about its wasteful and exploitative practices.



Sass Brown is the Assistant Dean of the School of Art and Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. She specializes in eco fashion and ethical design practices in the fashion industry, and is the New York editor of *Coco Eco Magazine*.

With 300 colour illustrations

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