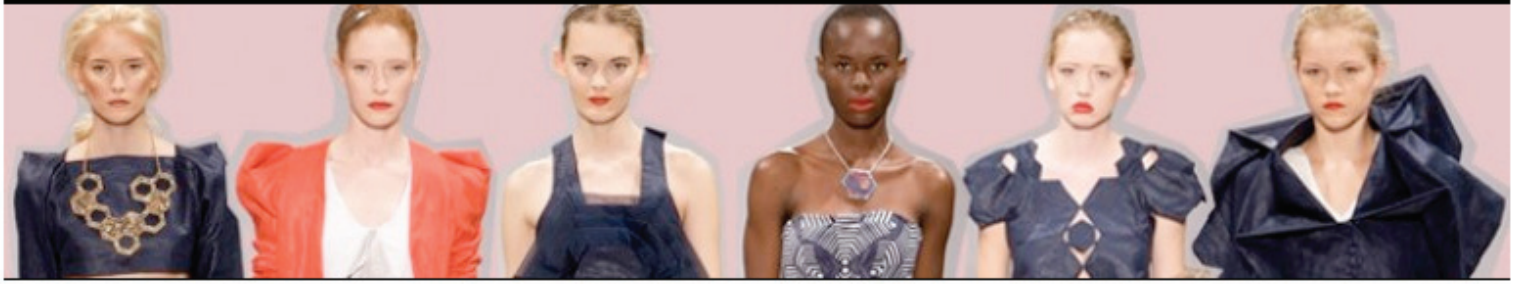


Launderette: Cleaning up dirty fashion

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [CONTACT](#) [PRESS](#)



Building an 'ethical' wardrobe – Q&A with Rewardrobe's Veronica Crespi

Posted on [03/02/2011](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

Striving to build an entirely ethical and sustainable wardrobe is undoubtedly a challenge. There isn't always an 'ethical' option on the market, and even if there is, sometimes it's not easy to find or it's unnervingly expensive. Case in point, finding good ethically-produced tights is notoriously tricky.

This is where [Rewardrobe](#) comes to the rescue – London's first '[slow wear](#)' style consultancy. Rewardrobe is the brainchild of Veronica Crespi, a fashion insider with impeccable Italian taste. Having previously worked as a designer, Product Developer and Trends Researcher for several labels, Veronica knows a thing or two about garment construction, fit, shape and trends that will last the test of time. Veronica isn't your typical wardrobe consultant either. She takes a different approach she calls "slow wear," in which she shows her clients that there is such as thing as responsible style.



Veronica Crespi, founder of Rewardrobe

With the help of the Rewardrobe team, you will not only get style directions, but learn about the best materials, the most interesting ethical labels, tips to buy quality clothes that will last for more than just one season, advice on environmentally-friendly garment care, and how to make the most of an organised and flawless wardrobe.

Launderette sat down with Veronica to discuss her “slow wear” approach and how she helps women embrace a new kind of wardrobe and shopping ethos, ultimately one that better respects people and the planet. Veronica shares with us her take on “slow fashion,” what it means to be ‘ethical’ and tips for upcycling instead of throwing out.



Launderette: Rewardrobe is London's first ever “slow wear” style consultancy. Launderette introduced the concept of “slow fashion” a few months back. As a response to the fast, throw-away of the current fashion culture, “slow fashion” is about valuing the time and effort it takes to produce quality, long-lasting garments. Tell us about what “slow wear” means for Rewardrobe.

Veronica Crespi: This is the same meaning for us! When advising clients for shopping, we try and bring their attention to ethical brands. However, we can't expect clients to fully turn into eco-fashionistas. That's why we prefer to use the term 'slow': because it encompasses so many little actions that each of us can take every day, that will have an impact even though we can't make the full 'eco' choice. Go for long-lasting choices when shopping, a more delicate and natural way of washing....

The thing is, once we have worked on a client's personal style, she'll have an enhanced awareness of what looks good on her, and this will immediately result in fewer wrong buys, that will end up discarded virtually unworn.

And for the things she does go out and buy subsequently, she'll go for items that will suit her better and she'll wear more and longer. And while she's making those choices, it for us to direct her towards quality brands, and possibly an ethical (organic / fair-trade / upcycled / bespoke tailored) alternative. Show her there is a wonderful world of brands out there that are fabulous and not quite so harmful.

Launderette: *“Upcycling” is also quickly becoming a serious trend with labels such as Goodone and From Somewhere garnering some positive attention from the mainstream fashion world. We love that Rewardrobe has a specific ‘Upcycling Service’. How does the service work?*

VC: When re-organising a wardrobe, inevitably a pile of unwanted clothes will be put together. Some of them are simply not fitting any longer, or are outdated – however the fabrics are often still good quality and beautiful. Sometimes that’s the reason why they haven’t been discarded yet, so the idea is: why not just make use of the fabric, even though shape and style are no longer fitting? I know a number of designers who can make amazing things with an unwanted garment, for the same price of buying a new top/skirt/jacket, and sometimes even cheaper. With the added bonus of having a completely unique new item, in often a quirky and stylish cut, in the same fabric/print we so much liked to begin with. A no-catch solution!

Launderette: *What’s the biggest ‘upcycling’ challenge you’ve tackled, to date?*

VC: The biggest is personal, and upcoming in the next few months. I myself have a number of garments I want to have transformed. I’m talking a puffer coat, a bunch of t-shirts, a suede skirt, knitwear, trousers, even some designer items I don’t fit anymore. So I’ve given myself the challenge to update my wardrobe this year by having those re-worked. It will also be a way of testing the skills of designers I haven’t collaborated with before, so I can refer them to my clients.

This is actually an open invitation: if you like infusing new life into clothes and want to have a go at mine, please get in touch. I will be talking about this project on my blog, and wearing the pieces when running my workshops or networking, so there’s an opportunity for some visibility too.

Launderette: *Do you any fail-proof ‘upcycling’ tips or any quick, easy ways to breathe new life into old clothes that you’d be willing to share with us?*

VC: Most of the times, the most simple thing most clothes need to be given a new lease of life is just some good old fashioned TLC. How many garments languishing in wardrobes just because of broken zips and missing buttons! Remember to fix these, check all your hems, and de-pill your knitwear – it’ll look like new again! Keep everything you wear looking like it was when new, and you’ll feel your wardrobe is actually full of boutique pieces. My mantra is that you can’t be stylish if you’re not groomed.

I also recently came across some ideas to wear big men’s shirts just by buttoning and tying in unexpected ways (upside down, back to front, using the sleeves as belt...). One of them is actually in The Sartorialist book: it goes to show that upcycled fashion is not just a fringe thing, but it can be incorporated in everyday wear with very stylish results.

Launderette: From water use to energy consumption to the harmful chemicals used in many detergents, garment care and clothes laundering is an often forgotten problem with massive negative impacts on the environment. How does Rewardrobe work with its clients on these issues?

VC: Advising on natural garment care is one of the first things we do. Like we said before, you can't be stylish if you're not groomed. And it's amazing the harm that regular tumble drying and dry-cleaning does to fabrics and garments. So, to keep clothes lasting longer, those should be avoided.

Then there's the issue of the nasty chemicals that get infused into fabrics with dry-cleaning processes, and that then transfer onto our skin, into our wardrobes and keep affecting the air we breathe in our own bedrooms. I don't like to think about that!

Luckily, these are also tips that stick well with people that are not fully consciously embracing a green lifestyle. Thankfully, owning a quality item means wanting to take better care of it – so any lady who is giving attention to their wardrobe will be a willing recipient of this kind of advice.

This is how I feel I make my small contribution to the cause: not just working with people who are already sensitive to the 'fast fashion' issues, but by advising clients who are unaware or uninterested in them, and still managing to steer them towards small actions that can have a major impact if implemented by most.

When we talk about 'slow wardrobe management' we mean: avoid dry-cleaning in most cases (most people don't know silk and cashmere can easily be hand-washed!), avoid tumble-drying, steam so you don't have to wash too often, wash at lower temperatures, use natural detergents, air dry...Not only you are giving your clothes the best possible treatment (the colours won't fade, the sapes will retain, wool won't bobble...), but you are saving on your utility bills – that is, on using up nature's resources.

Launderette: We hear time and time again that it's too difficult to shop entirely ethically and sustainably. How easy do you think it is to be an 'ethical' fashionista? What are some of the biggest challenges in embodying an ecological ethos in fashion?

VC: Yes it is difficult to shop entirely ethically and sustainably. To begin with, there's a debate inside the ethical fashion world, about what is truly ethical and sustainable. Unfortunately sometimes the two things don't go hand in hand – like with the issues with production of bamboo and organic cotton, or the fair-trade productions that still clock up on carbon miles to be shipped to the Western markets.

I'll try and make the ethical choice where possible, and apply the 'slow' rules in most other cases (buy better and less, keep naturally for longer). As a stylist, and as a shopper for myself, I find the difficulty is to find ethical basics. I know where to find a gorgeous ethical dress or knitwear, but when it comes to buying my everyday t-shirts, socks and pants, or towels, and especially tights, that's where it gets hard. Yes there is a small (and very expensive) choice in the market, but one needs to be a very informed (and well heeled) consumer to choose those. Most people will just pop down the high-street like they've always done, and that's how tonnes of cheap clothes still get bought and dumped on a daily basis.

Thanks Veronica for all the useful tips, get on board ladies (and gentlemen too)! Also, if you are London-based, keep an eye out for one of Rewardrobe's many upcoming workshops: [Lunchtime in the Lounge](#) or [Treats in the City](#) are smash hits!