

Bag full of change

A chance encounter inspired this woman to do her part to change the way we look at products.

Raewyn du Toit describes her work as “simple, bold, transformational and imaginative”. The scope of her brand, Ben and Bear’s, work extends into less charted territory — the likes of which would make the houses of Hermès and Chanel quiver with unfamiliarity, and environmental activists around the world rejoice.



Her bags are made in Thailand out of recycled rubber-tyre inner-tubes, along with a whole host of other recycled materials.

According to du Toit, her design aesthetic was inspired by a bag she had won in Singapore. The bag in question was a colourful South African design, made of old clothes hook-knotted through hessian.

Studying the construction of the bag,

she found herself toying with the idea of incorporating old clothes and belts into her own line of eco-bags. Unfortunately, inspiration for other materials that would support that idea was scarce.

In a twist of fate, however, she noticed a wastebasket made from the inner tubing of tyres while at a meeting with one of the manufacturers of her bags. She asked if a test bag could be made from the same inner tubing. The project turned out to be a success.

Incorporating strong colours and striking patterns into her bags, she creates bespoke pieces oozing character from the forgotten by-products of society. Part of the intrigue of her product, according to du Toit, is that her unusual choice of materials is usually one of the first things people notice.

A staunch believer in the power of the individual in influencing humanity’s impact on the environment, du Toit believes that her eco-bags are an



A MESSENGER BAG (LEFT) AND SHOULDER BAG (RIGHT) BY RAEWYN DU TOIT’S ECO-BRAND, BEN AND BEAR.

extension of her philosophy. She believes that there has to be a change in conscience in today’s consumer culture. When we asked her for details, she replied “It’s where people learn to value where, how and what a product is made of, and make a conscious choice to support companies that are responding to the global environmental crisis. In turn, this will pressure the companies to adopt better practices. When someone buys an eco-bag, they are expressing a statement of support for the cause.”

Raewyn du Toit is stretching herself to change the world — one person at a time.

Do your part

FOUR SIMPLE WAYS TO HELP THE ENVIRONMENT.



RIDE A BIKE

One quarter of the carbon emissions we produce pour out of the exhaust pipes of our vehicles. The damage has already been done, so nature can’t wait for you to buy one of those shiny new ultra-light zero-emission cars. Fortunately, you’ve had the perfect solution since you were about seven years old. Studies have shown that 40 per cent of the trips we make are 3km or less. If one million people made one of these trips on bicycle a week, up to 100,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions would be eliminated.



SWITCH TO REUSABLE BAGS

The average family throws away 1,500 plastic bags a year. Those bags take 1,000 years to decompose — that’s quite a legacy. Paper bags are biodegradable, but last year, they resulted in 14 million trees being felled to provide the raw material for them. If every Singaporean used a reusable bag for their groceries instead, we would eliminate the need for about 1.5 billion disposable bags a year. Good enough reason to carry your own bags, unless you relish the thought of living in a plastic “wonderland”.



REUSE THE NEWS

1,000 tons of newspaper recycled a year saves enough trees to absorb 113 tons of carbon dioxide. You will need to store the paper somewhere before it’s carted off to the recycling centre, but in the meantime, newspapers have a multitude of uses around the house. The next time you post a fragile item, cushion the box with balls of newspaper, which work better than eco-unfriendly styrofoam balls and bubble wrap. Replacing your wooden shoe trees with newspaper stuffing also helps your favourite kicks maintain their shape.



CARPOOL

The average commuter burns about 1,287 litres of petrol a year, which translates into a 3.4 tonne cloud of carbon dioxide floating in the atmosphere (not to mention getting into your lungs when you walk on the street). Ride with one passenger, and you’ve cut that in half. Worried about finding a parking space at your destination? Two (or more) pairs of eyes are better than one. And, if everyone were as forward-thinking as you, we probably wouldn’t have to contend with that many cars in the parking lot anyway.