

SATURDAY
July 30, 2005

COLUMNS K3
TELEVISION K6
COMICS K10-K11

K

The Sacramento Bee

SCENE

www.sacbee.com/lifestyle

INSIDE

Pet Connection
Dog and human are both better off if problems are corrected during puppyhood. **►Page K3**

Fashion conscience

Clothing and accessories are becoming both free-trade and chic

By Gina Kim
BEE STAFF WRITER



Splaff Flopps (\$40)

Made with recycled race-car tires and bicycle inner tubes, the flip-flop material is cleaned and cut in San Diego and then trucked to a factory in Mexico, where they are assembled. Workers there receive health benefits and paid vacation, and are paid about \$150 a week, three times the going rate.

The bottom line: It's hip. The bonus: It's guilt-free. Just the term, fair-trade clothing, might conjure images of potato sacks and shapeless blouses. At the very least, you're thinking of roughly woven ponchos or grubby straw hats.

But that's so passé. Sweatshop-free clothes are increasingly fashionable and popular, popping up in high-end styles and boutiques.

Edun, a new clothing line based on the fair-trade concept launched this year by U2 frontman Bono, his wife, Ali Hewson, and design-for-the-stars designer Rogan Gregory, proves it's chic to care.

"I want to look good, but I don't want to feel guilty," said Holly Ober, who opened a Davis

boutique this month. "The frustrating thing is there are socially responsible companies out there, but you have to research them. Who wants to do that?"

Ober's shop, Naked Thread, does the work for you — everything in the store is sweatshop-free or fair-trade, meaning the workers were paid what's considered a good wage in a factory with humane conditions.

And with stylish jeans, colorful bikinis, sturdy flip-flops, über-soft T-shirts and trendy jewelry, Ober is betting people will buy — even with prices like \$180 for a pair of jeans.

"It's like trying to get kids to eat broccoli when they want chocolate," she said. "People want cute clothing. But if they have a choice **► FAIR TRADE, Page K3**



Maggie's Functional Organics criss-cross tank (\$32)

This top was made with organic cotton by Magdalena Mujeres, a worker-owned cooperative in Nueva Vista, Nicaragua. The co-op was started by a group of women displaced by Hurricane Mitch. Maggie's Functional Organics has made a long-term commitment.



Namaste-UK bikini (\$75)

Handmade in Nepal, The British company designs most of its items in-house and then contracts with Indian, Nepalese and Thai workers to make them. They are often paid in advance, so they don't go into debt to buy the materials.



No Sweat high tops (\$48)

Workers at a union factory in Indonesia receive \$110 a month for making these shoes, get extra money based on their family size to buy rice, and receive health insurance and pensions. The Massachusetts-based No Sweat! sells only union-made clothing.



Edun jean skirt (\$120)

All denim products for Edun are made by workers at a family-owned factory in Tunisia. The idea behind the upscale men's and women's brand, launched by U2 singer Bono, is that profitable high fashion can be done ethically. The company believes in giving people work instead of charity.

Wildlife Works T-shirt (\$29)

Produced at an "eco-factory" in Kenya, the shirt features the number 6,500, which is the approximate number of orangutans left in the world. The San Francisco-based company is working toward wildlife preservation and created the 80,000-acre Rungwa Wildlife Sanctuary in Kenya. Next to the preserve is the eco-factory, which employs locals who otherwise might turn to poaching for their livelihoods.



Clothes courtesy of Naked Thread, Davis.

Environment Reporter/Staff Writer **By Florence Low**

Fair trade: Concern for workers drives firms' decisions

► FROM PAGE K1

and can look good and buy fair-trade, I think they'll go for what makes them feel good on the inside as well as the outside."

According to the socially conscious nonprofit Fair Trade Federation, fair trade means an equitable partnership between American marketers and foreign producers. Generally, the workers get a good wage in context of their local economies, have opportunities to advance, work in healthy and safe environments and have long-term relationships with the marketers.

Sales of fair-trade goods are on the rise, and the steep growth is not likely to level off in the near future, said Amanda Chehrezad, spokeswoman for Co-op America, a nonprofit advocacy group.

In 2002, the most recent figures available, North Americans spent \$180 million on fairly traded products, mostly coffee and tea, according to the Fair Trade Federation. That was up 44 percent from the year before.

"Part of it is definitely people becoming more aware and purchasing products that are based on their conscience," said Chehrezad.

"Every dollar you spend is like a vote, and you can decide to spend those dollars with good companies ... or you can spend with companies only concerned with the bottom line."

Businesses are listening. Every article of clothing sold by No Sweat, based in Waltham, Mass., was made by a union employee. To make it profitable, the company forgoes advertising, said president and chief

Loomstate jeans (\$180)

The organic cotton in these jeans was grown on farms in **Turkey, California and Texas**, and the jeans were assembled by workers in a **Los Angeles** factory. The company believes chemicals don't belong in fashion.

Inside detail



American Apparel kid's T-shirt (\$12), kid's shorts (\$10) and underwear (\$6)

The downtown **Los Angeles** company's goal is efficiency, and that means keeping everything, from design to manufacturing, under one roof. The 3,000 workers make between



How to know whether it's fair trade

Labels like "Made in Guatemala" don't reveal the conditions of the workers or how they were paid. Often, it's up to the company to decide how much of an item's history to reveal. But here are a few online references for do-it-yourself research.

- www.greenpages.org – a Web site supported by Co-op America, where you enter the item you're looking for to find fair-trade or socially conscious companies that sell it.
- www.responsible shopper.org – another Co-op America Web site to search companies and their track records with labor violations, environmental issues and ethics.
- www.sustainablestyle.org/osb/home.html – an online reference book by Sustainable Style Foundation that lists socially conscious companies.

– Gina Kim

Indigenous Designs men's button-up shirt (\$66)

Organic cotton grown on Portuguese farms and then put together by workers making a livable wage in **Guimaraes, Portugal**.

cerned with the bottom line."

Businesses are listening. Every article of clothing sold by No Sweat, based in Waltham, Mass., was made by a union employee. To make it profitable, the company forgoes advertising, said president and chief executive Adam Neiman.

But even without celebrity endorsements and magazine ads, No Sweat has reaped profits and seen staggering growth. The company grossed \$1 million last year and sold its products solely online, Neiman said. This year, the union-made clothes and shoes can be found in 135 stores around the world, and gross profits are expected to be about \$3 million, he said.

"It's a very little world, and if you're going to love your neighbor, well, we're all in the same neighborhood," Neiman said. "Loving your neighbor means loving your neighborhood seamstress."

Cliff Drill, the owner and founder of Splaf Flopps, sees the world the same way.

The flip-flop company makes shoes from old tires and used bicycle inner tubes.

"It's all stuff that otherwise would have been thrown in the garbage," said Drill, who identifies himself first as a surfer and then as an environmentalist.

The tires and tubes are sorted, cleaned and cut at a warehouse in San Diego, and then trucked to a factory in Mexico, where the workers get health care, paid vacations and earn about \$150 a week, about three times the going rate there, Drill said.

It's not charity, Drill insists.

"That's their value to me. I'm not really doing them a favor. I'm paying them what they're worth, and hopefully, eventually, I can pay them more," he said.

and underwear (\$6)

The downtown Los Angeles company's goal is efficiency, and that means keeping everything, from design to manufacturing, under one roof. The 3,000 workers make between \$13 and \$20 an hour, get medical and dental benefits, massages, subsidized bus passes and free bicycles.



Edun men's jeans (\$155)

Another item product made at a family-owned factory in Tunisia for the brand by U2's Bono.

to find places where they can pay the lowest wages and offer the least benefits."

Briggs admits she wears clothes that were likely produced in a sweatshop, but she believes awareness is the key to change.

ing power to change the world," he said.

Zanzibar Tribal Art, a midtown Sacramento import store, only sells fairly traded items, said owner Scott Farrell. While clothes are just 5 percent of the store's business, the Nepalese

stocks anymore," she said. "It really is possible to have high style that's fairly traded."

That is the basis of Bono's Edun brand.

"Our goal is producing a collection that is profitable and looks good, and is viable in the fashion

treated well, the reality isn't as peachy.

Busy schedules and increasing demands on time make it hard for professionals to research the history of the clothes they buy.

Susanne Westley, 48, of South

Indigenous Designs men's button-up shirt (\$66)

Organic cotton grown on Portuguese farms and then put together by workers making a livable wage in Guimaraes, Portugal.

Indigenous Designs, based in Santa Rosa, mostly contracts with workers from the highlands of Peru and Ecuador.

Deborah Lindquist silk and ribbon top (\$95)

This halter was made by the L.A. designer and her handful of assistants from ribbon and a vintage silk scarf. Lindquist believes in "reincarnating new fabrics" or recycling materials such as silk and cashmere. "I wanted to do something that's good for the planet," she said.



Sacramento Bee photography/Florence Low

going to buy it because it's a cute shirt," she said.

Ober, a lecturer at the University of California, Davis, is an unlikely haute boutique owner.

But with a doctorate in cultural anthropology, Ober teaches

founder of Splaff Flopps, sees the world the same way.

The flip-flop company makes shoes from old tires and used bicycle inner tubes.

"It's all stuff that otherwise would have been thrown in the garbage," said Drill, who identifies himself first as a surfer and then as an environmentalist.

The tires and tubes are sorted, cleaned and cut at a warehouse in San Diego, and then trucked to a factory in Mexico, where the workers get health care, paid vacations and earn about \$150 a week, about three times the going rate there, Drill said.

It's not charity, Drill insists. "That's their value to me. I'm not really doing them a favor. I'm paying them what they're worth, and hopefully, eventually, I can pay them more," he said.

That mantra is different from the textbook company always looking at the bottom line. In the classic business model, companies move their factories to wherever they can get the same product for the least amount of money without concern for the people doing the work.

But that mentality could lead to exploitative work environments.

"We live in a global economy today, where 97 percent of the clothing we buy is made offshore," said Barbara Briggs, a senior associate with the National Labor Committee, a human rights advocacy group. "Who is making the clothing in our names and selling the clothing are large U.S. retailers who are literally searching the world

Edun men's jeans (\$155)

Another item product made at a family-owned factory in Tunisia for the brand by U2's Bono.

to find places where they can pay the lowest wages and offer the least benefits."

Briggs admits she wears clothes that were likely produced in a sweatshop, but she believes awareness is the key to change.

"It's very critical we turn this around and figure out how to regulate the industry and make this clothing industry an industry with a human face and translates to the well-being of the families who are making this stuff," she said.

The most common corporate violations seen by Verité, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization that audits international factories, are low wages without overtime pay, health and safety problems, and anti-union policies, said executive director Dan Vliederman.

In China, workers are underpaid an average of 21 percent of their wages, he said.

"(Buying fair-trade products) is a way of using your purchas-

ing power to change the world," he said.

Zanzibar Tribal Art, a midtown Sacramento import store, only sells fairly traded items, said owner Scott Farrell. While clothes are just 5 percent of the store's business, the Nepalese and Indian workers who make its shirts, sarongs and other items are paid well, given child care and often receive a portion of the profits, Farrell said.

"I'm not in this to make a profit," he said about his store. "In my personal feeling, we're only as good as the weakest point within society. ... Making a profit off of someone else's pain and suffering doesn't sit well with me."

And fashion doesn't have to be sacrificed for conscience anymore, said Rebecca Luke, co-founder of the Seattle-based Sustainable Style Foundation, a nonprofit group working for sustainability within the style industries.

"You don't have to give up anything to be sustainable. It's not about hemp and Birken-

stocks anymore," she said. "It really is possible to have high style that's fairly traded."

That is the basis of Bono's Edun brand.

"Our goal is producing a collection that is profitable and looks good, and is viable in the fashion world and it's done in an ethical manner," said Edun spokeswoman Bridget Russo. "We ensure the best we can that everyone along the chain is not being taken advantage of in any way."

Edun also has made a commitment to its workers, whether in South America or Africa, to stay in their communities for the long term. The mantra is that it's better to give people work instead of aid.

"The idea is we're not going to move production based on price," Russo said. "We pay and stay, and don't cut and run, which happens quite often because with most companies, price is a priority."

While it's a no-brainer to want clothes in which the people along the assembly line were

handled by a handful of assistants from ribbon and a vintage silk scarf. Lindquist believes in "reincarnating new fabrics" or recycling materials such as silk and cashmere. "I wanted to do something that's good for the planet," she said.



Sacramento Bee photography/Florence Law

treated well, the reality isn't as peachy.

Busy schedules and increasing demands on time make it hard for professionals to research the history of the clothes they buy.

Susanne Westley, 48, of South Natomas, said she certainly would hesitate before buying clothing from a manufacturer with a poor reputation, but isn't likely to change her routine to hunt for fair-trade items.

"I don't know if I would go out of my way or pay extra for that stamp of approval," said Westley, who works as a real estate agent. "But if I know a country or manufacturer has a reputation for poor working conditions, it definitely puts a sour taste in my mouth when I think about buying their merchandise."

Ober, the owner of the Davis boutique that touts itself as the "House of Ethical Style," knows that selling people on fair trade is tough. But that's why she puts looking good first.

"You're going for something that looks fabulous. You're

going to buy it because it's a cute shirt," she said.

Ober, a lecturer at the University of California, Davis, is an unlikely haute boutique owner.

But with a doctorate in cultural anthropology, Ober teaches globalization and studies the effects of trade agreements.

Already a regular buyer of natural foods, she decided to branch out into clothing but found it frustrating to hunt down the background of every T-shirt or pair of jeans she bought.

She suggested the idea of a fair-trade-only store to students over the years, but when the shop never came to be, she decided to do it herself in February. She found the storefront, nestled between a cafe and a bank, in May, and opened July 10.

"The concept of fair trade," she said, "is alive and well in Davis."

■ ■ ■

The Bee's Gina Kim can be reached at (916) 321-1228 or gkim@sacbee.com.