



SO SEXY! Sustainable STYLE

By Jessica Ridenour

Nestled deep within L.A.'s leafy haven of Topanga Canyon, California, designer Deborah Lindquist's workshop bursts with color and light. It's from this cozy sanctuary that she reincarnates vintage fabrics into unique and stylish garments, ranging from exotic bustiers and corsets to sleeveless cashmere sweaters with matching arm socks. Having emerged as an eco-chic designer with a flair for

detail, she's garnered the attention of environmentalists and fashionistas alike.

Although her designs have been seen on celebrities such as Christina Aguilera, Charlize Theron and Alyssa Milano, don't think that her line is inaccessible to us shop mavens. Her organic fashions can be found at boutiques around the country, as well as online, without the superstar price tag.

JR: Can you tell me a little about how you got started in design?

DL: Well, I went to school at Parsons [School of Design] in New York. I first started working in the fashion industry for a company doing sleepwear and lingerie. I worked in children's for about three years—I did the Garanimals—the toddler boys' line. I had really wanted to do my own thing, so I began making a high-end belt

line. I did that for about nine years. And when I moved out to California in '89, I started to do clothing again.

JR: And then?

DL: The first thing was one-of-a-kind jackets I was making out of vintage fabrics—like bart cloth fabrics, curtain fabrics with romantic florals, or tropical fabrics, that kind of thing. It's blossomed into other things. I've always worked with vintage fabrics—even my first belt was made with an old leather jacket I cut up. So it's always been interesting to me to use one-of-a-kind things.

JR: Did you choose to use vintage pieces because of their unique quality?

DL: I find that it's more special...more interesting. And also I'm really trying to do something that can benefit the planet by recycling old things or using organic materials or both. For spring 2006, I'm starting to use more hemp, organic cotton, bamboo and silks.

JR: When did you decide it was important to use sustainable materials?

DL: I made my first belt using an old recycled leather jacket and then made jackets of vintage romantic floral and tropical curtains. I've used other non-eco fabrics along the way too but have always included something vintage in my work. Now I'm including eco-conscious fabrics in addition to the vintage fabrics I use to round out the collection and make it eco-conscious as a whole. I'm finding that now, eco-fabrics are being developed and becoming more available than ever before. It's great for designers to have more to choose from. I'm glad the industry is working to make these products available.

JR: You've really made a name for yourself as an eco-conscious fashion designer.

DL: Well, it's funny because I've been doing it for a long time but suddenly it's become cool.

JR: It's great when your interests collide with what's popular.

DL: Yeah, I think it's about intention for one thing but it's also wonderful when other people relate to it. You need both.

JR: So do you consider yourself an environmentalist?

DL: Yeah, I try. I figure we have to start somewhere. And I think everybody needs to

start with what they know how to do. If that means you're recycling your trash, then that's great. I just happen to design clothing and I figure that I should make my business really mean something.

JR: Where do you look for your materials?

DL: I work with a lot of people who bring in old clothes and recycle them. You know—digging through warehouses with bulk lots of fabrics. I use old scarves, cashmere fabrics, vintage kimonos and saris. The scarves are relatively new. I started using those for spring and they've been really fun because there are so many interesting patterns. Also I did a fashion show for the United Nations World Environment Day earlier this year in June and through that I met some people who do different kinds of environmentally friendly fabrics.

“I want to make the planet a better place to live by doing what I can to use sustainable and recycled fabrics in my work...”

JR: Where do you find inspiration for your designs?

DL: Nature inspires me...the colors of nature. Interesting fabrics are really inspirational because I'm looking at old things, interesting prints. I am really inspired by color too and I'm so glad that people are responding to color, finally. My first season, we did gray, black and tan for the entire winter and I thought, “Man, this is boring!” So now we're doing pinks and lavenders and peaches and tangerine. So it's really fun.

JR: What is it about nature that you find so appealing?

DL: I grew up on a farm next to a lake in Minnesota with lots of animals; it was a beautiful place to grow up. Nature nurtures my soul. I like warm weather, having grown up in a state that has such cold winters. I actually like all the seasons but can only take negative 50-degree windchills for a very short time—maybe a day!

JR: Do you have any favorite designers?

DL: I like Vivienne Westwood—her punk, quirky aspects. I love her corsets. She's very talented. I think she's probably influenced a lot of people. Zandra Rhodes—I've just always loved her textiles from long ago. She was really

popular in the '80s. Those are two whom I think of right off the bat. I'm always looking at everyone else's work in magazines. I really loved Gucci when Tom Ford was designing it.

JR: Can you describe your creative process?

DL: I'm really self-motivated. I've had my own business for 22 years, so if I weren't self-motivated, I would have quit a long time ago because it's not that easy to run a business, and a creative one at that. We start at 7 a.m., early. I'm involved in production and, since I'm working with one-of-a-kind cashmeres that are vintage, I really need to have my hands on the sweaters, to cut them, etc. It's all very hands-on work. I certainly don't do every aspect of it but I do run the room and make sure everything is being done correctly.

JR: What do you think will be the “must-have” for this winter?

DL: Well, my sweaters, of course! It's interesting because cashmere is so popular right now and it's in every price range. I've found that to be my best item for fall/holiday, although I sell a lot of bustiers too. The bustiers are fun because they're very

feminine and womanly. I do them usually out of kimono or sari fabrics, but then I do some tweeds too with feathers and other trims as well.

JR: What is your ultimate goal for the Deborah Lindquist line?

DL: I want to make the planet a better place to live by doing what I can to use sustainable and recycled fabrics in my work, and I want women to look pretty in what I design. I also want to make enough money to buy a house by the beach.

JR: So, your dream vacation—mountains or ocean?

DL: I think ocean right now.

JR: If you close your eyes and envision your dream vacation, what do you see?

DL: I would like to go to a tropical place by the beach where I can relax and swim in the ocean.

JR: Foam is definitely all about the ocean.

DL: Perfect!

See deborahlindquist.com for a list of stores.

