



HARMONIZING HUMANITY, NATURE AND FASHION

ECOSTYLE

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PROTECTING our planet is a moral and spiritual duty, stresses interdominational patriarch Bartholomew I, who presides in Istanbul, Turkey, and was elected an ecumenical patriarch in 1991. He publicly linked spirituality with ecology after his 1997 trip around the Black Sea.

Bartholomew's statements stirred further discussion about the role of ecology on religious life when he examined catastrophes along the Danube River in 1999. In 2002, more than 250 priests, rabbis and professors joined him around the Adriatic to view chemical spills in Albania and rising water threats in Venice. The Associated Press published these ecological missions in 2003.

People with varied faiths everywhere want to sustain our environment, but many fashion and design world protectors focus on two specific goals: saving natural resources and preventing animal cruelty. Respect for nature, wildlife and all living creatures is an obvious requisite to protect our planet from manufacturing, but can these two goals form a global blueprint for human harmony with nature?

Yes, I believe these goals do make a common blueprint, but regional methods of protection are not that simple. Every community possesses unique agricultural habitats with needs that require continuous fine-tuning. Admired development and manufacturing policies for one locale can vastly differ from another.

Some find it strange when a petro-

leum-based synthetic is praised while a natural material like fur is condemned. To learn each story of creation, from the stewards of land to the designers, is to understand the environmental connection every supplier holds. New Zealand's plague of possums is a unique, ecological example.

The Australian brush-tailed possums were declared pests of epidemic proportions in New Zealand in early 2001. They were causing death and destruction to much of the particular native habitat on the South Pacific country's islands. Native trees were decimated and birds' eggs were eaten. Even community animal rights activists wanted the critters to disappear. Then local entrepreneurs got interested, formulated better solutions, and decided to market possum products.

Items made of possum fur are stylish and feel luxurious, but hold a reasonable price tag. Much of the merchandise comes with a label that reads, "Thank you for buying possum fur. You are helping to save our environment." The country's environmental groups are honored with thumbs-up support

and their economic strategists are gleaming with pride. New Zealand's famed, fine merino wool blends beautifully with genuine fur. Fake fur is full of chemicals resulting in more pollution. Thus, ethical fur makes sense for New Zealand's place and time.

Will eco designers from other parts of the globe share this environmental perspective? There are plenty of animal rights activists that scorn any use of an animal in any matter. What would Bartholomew think of the New Zealanders' solution?

The point is to support earth-friendly designers in their setting with a simple common blueprint, but without a blanket and discriminatory attitude. We must respect all efforts to save natural resources and prevent animal cruelty in order to effectively harmonize humanity with nature and fashion. □

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