

QWSTION

When the Swiss label QWSTION first started developing their products, the question they were facing was "How do we want to produce?" And since the next question following naturally would be "where will that be?" they had to come up with a place and partner that would fit their high expectations. Since the textile industry has a bad reputation after many catastrophes (for example Rana Plaza), Asia did not seem to be a good choice – until they found the right partner.

Just outside of Hong Kong, a small, independent facility of production manufactures QWSTION's prototypes, that are designed and developed in Zurich, but: in rather Western European circumstances and conditions. As a member of the BSCI (Business and Social Compliance Initiative), QWSTION works with conditions that have been guidelines to and from the European Union and are therewith the same as in European countries. But not only the con-

ditions for the workers are different and innovative, also the technical work is a big step ahead of the game: A new development in the production is keeping the rest of the yarn of eco-cotton and weaves it back into the cotton fabric. This does not only create a beautiful result in terms of looks, but is also sustainable. "Raw-cycled" combines individual looks and fair, modern ways of recycling. Being true to themselves, QWSTION's perspective from day one has always been: "ask good questions and you will get good answers".

To find out more about the philosophy of QWSTION and why "Made in China" is not necessarily "made in China" Sarah Weyers talked to them for SUPERIOR MAGAZINE right after SEEK where they presented their latest collection.



Why do you think eco- or sustainable fashion has such a bad image and how was the feedback you got from Berlin Fashion Week?

Some time ago there were barely any brands that found a good balance of fairness and good design. That is, fortunately, changing and we want to be a part of that change, that movement. Yet, the people that are conscious about where the products they consume come from, are the minority. The SEEK exhibition during Berlin Fashion Week was a great success for us. Many people from different parts of the industry told us that our individual and authentic look is a big advantage we have to other "fair" brands and the materials we use got a great feedback, too.

What materials do you use? Why did you get such a good response to them?

Three years ago we started using our self-developed organic-cotton-fabric and we are constantly expanding the percentage we use of that in every collection. It's still a long road ahead of us but we are constantly working on it, because we are so convinced of the philosophy. By now, half of our products are made of GOTS-certified cotton.

When you say that it has been such hard work to develop the cotton you use, as well as producing with GOTS-certified cotton, is the production much more expensive?

Yes. Since no pesticides are used to harvest the cotton, the harvest is obviously much smaller than it is in the process of using chemicals. The problem with that is

that the consumer needs to be willing to spend more money on a "good" product. The consumer needs to want more information. The consumer needs to want the change. We can only offer the products, but the market still offers very cheap clothes and accessories that have obviously been produced in poor conditions. The thinking and appreciation of fashion needs to change, but we are definitely going in the right direction.

The production of QWSTION is in China. While your dogma is "question the norm", how do you question it? Producing in Asia has a terrible reputation, how are you working against that and showing that it is also possible to produce elsewhere than from what the majority thinks?

That is true. Our organic-cotton is from Central Asia and the manufacturing of our bags takes place close to Hong Kong. We are in the process of implementing the BSCI-Standards to achieve working conditions that are confirm with EU-standards. Also, it is a small, independent production-facility, in which even the owners work every day, which is also very different from how big companies work in Asia.

Would you say that a change of mind is also a goal of your label for the future?

Definitely. The process of changing someone's attitude towards something is always hard work and takes some time. We want to make people think about where their product comes from, as well as being willing to invest in someone's innovative idea and design. By expanding our thought we would not only create new jobs, but also change the market – step by step.

So you say that working with a transparent production and enough information for the consumer on how the product was made and where, that this is the first step to a "better" and "more green" industry?

Yes. And reliable standards and certificates that guarantee a certain level of either working conditions, wages, fabrics and much more.

Since half of the products you have were made from GOTS-certified cotton; would you say that using these certificates has been a big factor in your success? Do people want verification and security when they buy a product?

Absolutely. The number of people that are conscious about ethics and ecology is growing; still the image of being "green" is a little cliché – but we're working on it!

Thank you for the interview.