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Sonjia Norman: Hunting with Passion and Compassion

Rebecca Koppenhaver · Tuesday, October 14th, 2014

Exclusive Interview with the Hong Kong-based designer and environmental activist

Sonjia Norman is a fashion *stylist*, an environmental activist, a mother, and a self-described “hunter.” She is busy. The daughter of a Korean mother and a South African father, the former lawyer decided over a decade ago that her creativity had more to offer the world than her full-time law career would allow. She quit her job and never looked back.

Born with a flair for creation and fashion, she began designing clothing for Hong Kong’s well-heeled fashion paramours, which led to the opening of her eponymous atelier, Myst Limited, in 2005. Located in the Wanchai district of Hong Kong, the boutique is an eclectic mix of the past and the future, the stylishly classic, the extraordinary exotic, and the rare. According to Sonjia, Myst Limited and all it contains are the apogee of a life inspired by multi-culturalism, love for the environment, art and beauty. Think restructured antique kimonos, handmade shoes, and sumptuous hand-embroidered women’s wear mixed with old and new finds from around the world. “I like to think of myself as a hunter,” says Sonjia. “I’m always looking for the eclectic, something special and beautiful, those collectable items that people would not only think of as clothing, but as art.”

She also shuns what she refers to as disposable fashion, “your favorite white shirt should be your favorite white shirt, and it should last for a decade.” Myst Limited, with its mixture of high-end brand names such as Christian Luppi, and Gaurav Gupta, along with Sonjia’s own creations, reflect her sense of timelessness and quality with a strong flair of funky youthfulness.



From Sonjia’s newest collection

Sonjia divides most of her time between Hong Kong, London and Croatia with rarely a minute to spare. Her children live and go to school in London, she was born and raised in Hong Kong, considers that her home, and spends long hours in the shop. When she can manage a few free days, she jets off to Croatia where she regularly spends time and the place where most of her creative inspiration is born. “You have people from all over living there, different religions, different cultures. Everything there inspires me and my work. I love it.”

Eventually, inspiration pushed Sonjia to further her endeavors. In 2009, a conversation she had over breakfast with friends from Los Angeles changed her life forever, according to Sonjia. “They were telling me about these massive gyres of plastic floating around in the oceans and how it was impacting sea life and human life. I couldn’t believe how immense the problem was.” She did

some research on her own and decided she needed to make that part of her life's work. As a result, she co-founded *The Plastic Oceans Foundation* in 2009. The foundation, based in Hong Kong, London, and the U.S., works to educate the public about the need for change and persuade industry to take responsibility in the manufacturing/disposing processes. "Less than 2% of philanthropy worldwide is given to sea conservation," says Sonjia, "but we are working to change that."

The foundation is currently finishing up production on the film, *Plastic Oceans*. The film, which has been in production for almost over six years, was shot in dozens of locations around the globe and contains some of the world's foremost experts in health, science, toxicology and oceanography. Although the film portrays the plastic pollution situation as a challenging reality, Sonjia says it ultimately carries a hopeful and inspiring message that will encourage people to take action in their everyday lives.



Sonjia Norman

Meanwhile, Sonjia continues to raise money for the foundation and the completion of the film using her unique flair for design. She has begun creating and selling a high-end line of kimonos and shawls inspired by the sea and nature to benefit the cause. One hundred percent of the profits made from the sale of these pieces go to The Plastic Oceans Foundation.

And that coincides with yet another new venture for Sonjia. The start-up of her new online retail site, home to numerous of her one-of-a-kind creations along with the collection of kimonos and shawls. SonjiaOnline.com, just relaunched.

"There are a lot of good things happening," says Sonjia as she prepares to jet off to Beverly Hills to attend a fundraiser for The Plastic Oceans Foundation and hunt for treasures for Myst Limited and her new site. "I love all of it. It's my passion."

Top image from Sonjia Norman's newest collection.

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