

Sustainable Solutions

Sustainable alternatives to commercial clothing and accessories that might outlast the consumer

Text By EVANGELINE NEVE

For years now, the Roses' company, Wild Fibers, has been on an evolving journey to produce the best quality thread and fabric possible, using locally sourced, sustainable, wild growing plants. Wild Fibers had its inception in 1993, born of a desire to provide a quality alternative to cotton. Cotton, now grown all over the developing world, not only uses a large amount of chemical pesticides, but also the need for it pushes up prices which, understandably, causes it to be grown instead of food crops, and that usually in countries where food is scarce or in limited production.

Originally, their desire was to use hemp, and after setting up business in Nepal, they spread the word to villagers that they would buy their hemp. Only after stripping off the bark and beginning work on it did they find that as it had gone to seed already, it was too tough for clothing. With 44 tons of the wood and



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no use for it, the company nearly ended up in the paper business—only to be saved by a coincidental encounter with a villager wearing an old jacket made from nettle. The wild and sustainable fabric long searched for was in hand.

It took several years of difficulties before the business became what it is today—a premier producer of natural nettle thread, which the Roses export, supply local producers with, as well as manufacture their own line of quality clothing. You can see a large variety of what can be made with this versatile plant at their showroom in Thamel Chowk, under the Yeti Airlines office. Rugs, towels, bags of all sizes, slippers—and much more. Their bestselling items are their shirts—blended with cotton and nettle and woven with a quality and strength that ensures your clothing might even outlast you. Another item they are extremely proud of is their new line of bags—as with the shirts, these might set you back a little more than your average local purchase, but count on them lasting forever.

Currently, there isn't a machine here capable of spinning nettles into a fine

enough thread for making cloth that is 100% nettle—ironically because the tensile strength of the nettle thread is such that it breaks machines meant for cotton and wool. So Wild Fibers has ordered a custom built one, and when it arrives perhaps next year, it will take the production of nettle fabric in Nepal to a whole new level. As nettles grow wild all over Nepal, no cultivation or pesticides are needed, and villagers can benefit directly from gathering a product that will still be there tomorrow, and the day after, sustainably reproducing itself with no effort from them and without taking resources that would be used to grow food.

Something that struck me when speaking with the Roses was that here were people who put their money where their mouth was, so to speak, and instead of just preaching about the world's problems, had chosen to do something about it—in the form of a creative and profitable business. If more people did this, there'd be a lot more solutions around. ■

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