

Global Case Writing Competition 2010

Social Entrepreneurship Track

Finalist

NOIR/ILLUMINATI II (B): Greenwash and anorexic models

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oikos sustainability case collection

<http://www.oikos-international.org/projects/cwc>

Peter could not believe his eyes. He was just sifting through comments posted on the Inhabitat¹ website following the London and New York Fashion Weeks. While the articles themselves were very supportive of his strategy and Rikke Wienmann's collections, the postings on the website's readers' comments were direct attacks on his sustainability rationale, basically labeling it "greenwash," and very critical of his choice of models, too skinny by today's standards and concerns for anorexia.

With the violent heartburn receding, he tried to understand what the implications of such rash customer perceptions could be for the brand and its positioning. Maybe this was just an isolated incident from disgruntled British and American customers, overexposed to the issues and hence over-sensitive to them. But maybe it also reflected a turning point in the Corporate Social Responsibility movement. Were people really starting to feel that way? Were they starting to question these CSR labels and how much they really did for people in Africa? Was this the beginning of the dreaded backlash against the new green political correctness? Was CSR now also spreading to issues such as people's weights?

The responses from the fashion editor and other readers were encouraging, but it was time maybe to prepare for similar questioning of the underlying philosophy of the company. It was time for sure to shed more light on Illuminati II's contributions to Ugandan's farmers...

March 4, 2007: London Fashion Week: Noir Fall 2007²

by Jill Danyelle



Noir is a relatively new label founded by Copenhagen native Peter Ingwersen and designed by Rikke Wienmann. The label has been burning up the runway with its hot looks, but Noir's

¹ Inhabitat.com is a weblog devoted to the future of design, tracking the innovations in technology, practices and materials that are pushing architecture and home design toward a smarter and more sustainable future. Inhabitat was started by NYC designer and graduate architecture student Jill Fehrenbacher as a forum in which to investigate emerging trends in product, interior and architectural design. Emily Pilloton is the managing editor; Sarah Rich and Evelyn Lee and Jorge Chapa are senior contributing editors.

² <http://www.inhabitat.com/2007/03/04/london-fashion-week-noir-fall-2007/>

sexiness is based in sustainability. They are connected with Illuminati-II, a textile company that will launch in 2008. The company was created to brand, market and sell high-level, organic cotton fabrics and Noir is being built as the vessel. Their first collection, Spring 2006, contained 30% certified fabrics. This has been increased seasonally to 70% with their most recent collection. The certified fabrics range from silks to cottons to wools. The certification standards are either Oeko-Tex or EU Eco Label. Additionally, Illuminati II is a member of the United Nations Global Compact and supports ILO, The International Labour Organisation, ICC's Business Charter for sustainable development and UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Finally, the Noir foundation will contribute to secure the workers in Uganda and ensure that the needs for things such as wells and medicine are met.

Peter Ingwersen recently stated, *"Illuminati II is created to prove that organic and ethical fabrics can be used in luxurious and sexy designs as proven in the Noir collection."*

Season after season, the label continues to illustrate just that. Its recent show during London fashion Week was no exception. It closed the show with two stunning gowns, leaving little excuse for not going green on the red carpet. What came beforehand was perhaps its most ambitious collection yet. It had plenty of Noir's signature "darkness", but also included crisp white shirts and soft neutrals in plenty of wearable styles that continue to adhere to its inspiration of strong tailoring that is often a feminine interpretation of the masculine armoire.

Noir's Fall 2006 Raven collection:





Fall 2007 images courtesy style.com

Responses to “LONDON FASHION WEEK: Noir Fall 2007”

April 4th, 2007 at 10:26 pm Blake says:

Does anyone find it a bit repulsive that this brand is basically tying its sales to the plight of poor African farmers? Basically “Buy our clothes or they go hungry”. There is plenty of fair trade and organic cotton already on the market to choose from if serious about helping people so no need to start some new organizations at some future date as long as you keep buying.

Noir is heavily marketed as sustainable, eco, etc. yet up to this latest season they used mostly regular cotton and a lot of leather. The crazy part is that this is stated and yet they are still being highlighted everywhere as the line to save the world. Certified Oeko Tex 100 does not mean sustainable. It only means that the dyes (which are still bad) are free of heavy metals and controlled instead if dumped in the environment. Almost all dyeing in Europe is Oeko Tex 100 these days.

Can anyone recognize greenwashing anymore? If someone makes a big noise about how much good they are doing in the world then this deserves to be scrutinized. No free passes just because there is the occasional exposed nipple.

April 27th, 2007 at 3:04 pm Jill Danyelle, fashion editor, says:

Blake,

I clearly view Noir differently. I don't think that they are trying to get you to buy their clothes so that you won't feel guilty about the plight of poor Africans. I think they are trying to be supportive of the people that support the cotton industry. It is difficult to start a huge agricultural project overnight. I feel Mr. Ingwersen was very open and transparent about the company's current production and future goals. Illuminati is also one of the few companies to focus on producing quality eco-textiles for the apparel industry. We need these companies in the supply chain to support the industry.

At this point, certified fabrics are better than nothing. Additionally, there may not be plenty of fair trade and organic cotton on the market, especially if you are talking about finished textiles for high end designs. We need eco-design in all levels of the apparel market.

As the sustainable bubble rises, yes, we will see more greenwashing. However, I believe transparency is key. It is up to the media (and consumers) to educate themselves. As you noticed, I did ask questions about the fabric. I am not sure many other fashion journalists could even tell you what SKAL or ISO 1400 means. I don't see Noir trying to earn points and customers as much as I see them trying to raise awareness in an industry that has been very slow to tip. One way to get a fashionista's attention is to design a stellar collection.

September 10th, 2007 at 4:25 pm Ksrline Says:

What Noir is doing is very important. They are not greenwashing, they are the real deal. They may be new on the American market but Peter Ingwersen has been director of a very respected high end fashion label in Denmark. He is a first mover-trend setter. Noir is spreading the awareness amongst fashionistas around the world (especially in northern Europe) about the story about how the clothes are made. This is helping create the demand for sustainable and fairtrade labels and items. If you work in design you know that finding sustainable materials is a challenge. We need the demand and awareness for the development of high quality products and process to happen. Fashion is an important and powerful factor. Fashion is communication. Please support Noir for being part of leading the way.

September 9, 2007: New York Fashion Week: Noir Spring 2008³

by Jill Danyelle



Yesterday, the Danish label NOIR held its first show during New York Fashion Week. The socially and environmentally conscious label was a welcomed addition to the slowly growing, yet still miniscule contingent of designers showing eco-friendly options here. NOIR worked with model Shalom Harlow for their spring campaign (above). The model is well known for her support of eco-friendly fashion. Continue reading for details on the collection and images from the show.

³ <http://www.inhabitat.com/2007/09/09/green-fall-fashion-week-noir/>

For Spring 2008, their fifth collection, the line was dedicated to 'transparency'. The duality of this concept for NOIR was expressed physically with the launch of their Nu NOIR lingerie collection, while also being woven into their CSR business model. While the collection kept within the overall dark and sexy theme the label has become known for, there were some touches of lightness and color, such as the bright pink dress in a double layer of African cotton and silk. The continued use of leather won't win over any vegans, but there were plenty of other fabrics that could garner the respect of environmentalists in general. The collection was comprised mainly of organic and African cottons, silks and oeko-tex certified fabrics in caviar grays, black and white.

Hopefully, the added presence of another eco label at the shows will underscore the diversity we can see in eco-fashion. Fashion companies and designers may begin to realize that designing with the environment in mind has little to do with adhering to any one aesthetic.







Responses to “NEW YORK FASHION WEEK: Noir Spring 2008

September 10th, 2007 at 7:11 pm Rachelblue says:

Can't designers use real people as models - people who occasionally smile, eat and think real thoughts? Sigh! Good on Noir for their environmental and social principles but these designs seem quite dull to me - not very inspiring - same old same old - yawn!

September 11th, 2007 at 12:25 am Mel says:

Wow, you seem a bit cynical, Rachelblue. Models are, in fact, actual people who eat, smile, and think and it irritates me when people judge them based on what they've seen them do for 30 seconds on a catwalk. Being pretty and slim doesn't make them idiots. And you do realize that it is the designers who instruct the models not to smile?

That said, I agree about the designs. They're definitely more high-fashion than a lot of environmentally conscious brands, but the styles are pretty 'done'.