

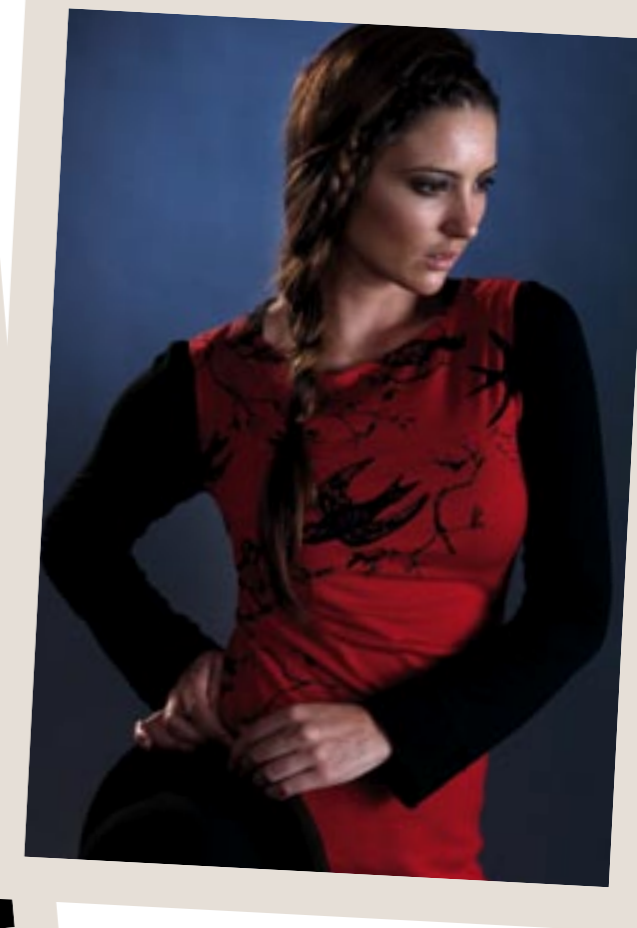


pure pod

By Leeyong Soo

When Kelli Donovan was planning her sea change from Melbourne to Mullumbimby, NSW, working as a tea lady at the local hospital did not enter her mind. After 18 years in the fashion industry, the designer made the move together with her partner, former Sydney-based commercial photographer Sean Watson, to pursue their dream of establishing an eco-fashion label, not to dabble in the ancient art of serving up hot beverages and bikkies. But unlike green fashion, money doesn't grow on trees, and so for a few months earning an income took priority over Pure Pod, the brand they had started together. Ultimately, though, it was the hard yards at the hospital that sparked the impetus to devote more time to their dream.

"It gave me an insight into the delicacy of human health and letting your dreams go and making the most of good health and being able to do what you wanted. I didn't want to regret any more that I hadn't given it a try!" says Kelli, who at the end of 2006 bid a last goodbye to the tea trolley and her work as a yoga and pilates teacher to concentrate on developing Pure Pod.



Pure Pod 09 Collection photos Courtesy of Sean Watson
For more info on Pure Pod go to www.purepod.com.au

Despite their proximity to Byron Bay and its reputation as somewhat of a hippy haven, the couple wanted to escape the stereotype that most consumers associate with eco-brands.

"What we were looking for when we first started wasn't the daggy old hippy hemp most consumers relate to eco clothing. We wanted something more modern and ultimately with more of a luxury chic edge that was suitable for a lifestyle range."

And so began the process of investigating and investing in eco-friendly materials such as bamboo, hemp, and fabrics made from soya bean.

"I think I spent the last of my savings in late 2006 on fabrics to begin. They sounded like you could eat them so I couldn't resist," says Kelli.

While the bamboo denim pieces in the winter collection certainly do look good enough to eat, it would be a shame to snack on something so stylish. In high waisted wide legged pants, vests and pinafore styles, the bamboo denim is the perfect base for the brand's printed merino wool and organic cotton jersey pieces. This season bird and leaf prints prevail, set against backdrops of strong, fresh colours such as jade green and pillarbox red and more muted forest and earth tones. In keeping with the brand's focus on versatility and comfort, styles are kept simple - but Kelli points out that there's another very important reason for this.

"I have tried to keep our clothing simple and not follow fast fashion. From an eco point of view it is much better for the environment as there is less wastage, pollution and throwaway fashion sticking to simpler styles."

Although merino wool pieces feature in the collection, there are no chunky knits, the emphasis instead being on light trans-seasonal items which reflect the Australian made brand's beachside location and outdoor living ethic. Style-seekers with sensitive skins will welcome the range as it contains no formaldehyde and no heavy metals are used in the dyeing processes.

In particular, bamboo fabric, with its anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties, is ideal for the warmer Australian climate. The fast-growing moso bamboo used to make the fabric rarely needs pesticides or chemicals to grow (Kelli says that no pesticides or chemicals are used at all to grow the bamboo used in Pure Pod's fabrics), requires no watering when grown in areas of sufficient rainfall, grows vertically and therefore takes up much less land than traditional fabric crops such as cotton, and regenerates naturally, meaning no annual planting is necessary for farmers.

While bamboo is often lauded as the next eco-fabric, it currently still requires chemicals for processing. However, Kelli believes that increasing demand for eco-textiles will lead to more research into alternative processing methods - and believes that even now, bamboo is a great eco-option.

"The good thing about the denim is that it is not washed in harsh washing chemicals like normal denim jeans. Most people don't realise the washing treatments in their jeans (to achieve effects such as stonewash or to run off excess dye) can be from chemical reactions. Ours have been washed in cold water and processed with no chemicals used. We do this so the colour won't run too much in the first few wears. Denim is washed so harshly to lose this colour. Ours will need to be washed separately for a while for the colour to go but it is a bigger price to pay for the environment if we get it commercially washed with acids."

Add to this the fact that most denim is made from conventional cotton - meaning chemicals, fertilisers and pesticides are used for growing, precious water is used for irrigating, and chemicals are again used in the processing - and the bamboo denim certainly looks like a much more eco-friendly alternative.

"No process is perfect but at least we have taken the plunge and are starting to make a change," says Kelli. "We try to do as many other green practices as possible, practice what we preach. If a small little company like ours can do it, why can't bigger companies with more impact do it too?"