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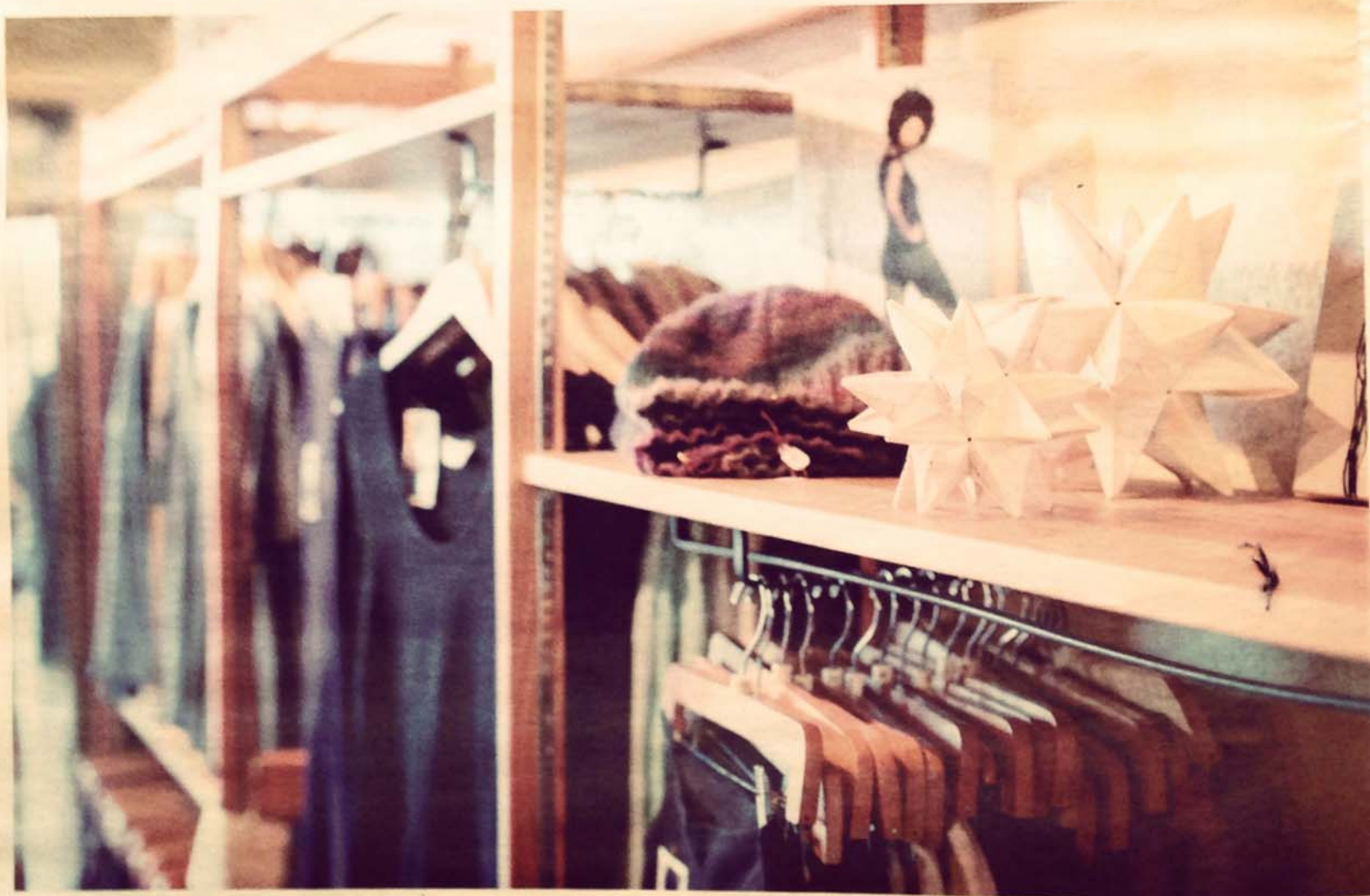
WKND

# DOWN TO THE THREADS

**WHERE YOUR CLOTHES COME FROM MATTERS.** Unlike many popular clothing companies, these local vendors always work with environmentally friendly materials and are conscious of fair labor practices.



# MAKING A FAIR TRADE







As Ashley Adelman and Connor Dougherty pull jeans, leggings and sweaters from their closets and drawers, they read aloud the familiar brand names: Forever 21, Lululemon, Nike, Gap. For many university students, these companies serve as common go-tos for modern, familiar styles at reasonable prices.

"Forever 21 is my favorite," says Adelman, a sophomore at the University of Oregon. "I can honestly spend hours mixing and matching from the store's giant selection and they keep up with the trends really well."

Next, the two begin tag searching to reveal where their clothes were produced. China, Indonesia and Taiwan top a long list of overseas countries. These tags can be traced to factories notorious for their irresponsible production practices — child labor, dangerous working conditions and worker abuse often top the list. But as outsourcing and sweatshops have become buzzwords for the last decade or so, movements to support responsible brands and companies — which encompass fair-trade and eco-friendly practices — are rising. Eugene in particular accommodates many businesses that honor them.

Ian Kleban, owner of Greater Goods at 515 High St., stocks her apparel section with garments made with only eco-friendly materials. Every product is purchased from fair-trade companies, where workers receive deserved wages and company care for their work. There's a short bio on a tag for a dress made by Avatar clothing about Sarita Tharu. She's a 21-year-old woman in Nepal who was rescued from slave conditions along with more than 35 other women and is now an integral part of the clothing line's production.

Kleban's favorite apparel trading company is Ganesh Himal, whose Nepali and Tibetan producers design modern, yet traditional, eastern-inspired wear for western folk. The company receives profit-sharing, health care and loan benefits.

She sees many problems behind commercial garment production and therefore does her part to counteract the commercial garment industry.

"Change doesn't occur if people aren't paying attention to the issues at hand," Kleban said. "Dirt cheap clothing is likely not necessitating the rights and needs of those producing it. It's important to look beyond the price tags."

Take a pair of Old Navy jeans that Adelman often wears for instance. If you read the tag, you'll see that they were made in Bangladesh. If you research further, you'll find they were produced at the New Collections factory, where the Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights documented a case of a seven-month pregnant woman losing her baby after 100-hour work weeks, one of a man being beaten with sticks after requesting his wife be given maternity leave and a multitude of management personnel handing out false pay slips in order to comply with legal hours and wages.

"I had never really thought about it," Dougherty says, sorting through info on Free2Work, a website which rates brands on a scale from Fs to

As and provides information regarding popular apparel companies and their labor practices.

On it, brands like The North Face, Forever 21 and Express receive grades of D minuses and Fs under the "workers rights" criteria for not paying their producers living wages.

"You kind of just trust the brands you love to do the right thing," Dougherty said.

Mira Fannin is the owner of Eugene-based, enviro-friendly Sweet Skins Eco Boutique located at 782 Blair Ave. She designs her clothing using organic materials and oversees all production, solely done locally in order to ensure quality and fair labor. The organic hemp and cotton blends that she uses are sourced from socially responsible Enviro Textiles in China, a forefront in the organic fabric movement since the 70s.

"Big clothing companies produce a huge amount of waste and record levels of pollutants with everything from highly pesticide-laden cotton to toxic synthetics and dyes to slave labor practices," Fannin explains. "The fact is, it's much more expensive to produce clothing organically and consciously, making sure that every life that the process touches is enhanced rather than destroyed."

Paula Georgetown, manager of the eco boutique and religious buyer of environmentally friendly wear agrees.

"Items from shops like Forever 21 and H&M are kind of just trendy, fall-apart throwaways, usually tossed or resold. The comfort and quality of articles like these makes them wearable for years. The price does reflect that," she explains.

The price also reflects the fair pay of all involved.

"In the end, you do get a more expensive product and a lower profit margin," Fannin says.

Across the street, 21-year-old employee Robin Nova maintains an extensive fair-trade and organic hemp clothing collection at Sweet Potato Pie (775 Monroe St.). She points out domestically-produced clothing from a southern California company called Vital Hemp.

The shop also carries local clothing line Practical Rabbit, created and designed by Ally Valkyrie, voted Best Local Hell-Raiser of 2013 by Eugene Weekly for her local protests on securing human rights for those displaced and homeless.

"I put my own money where I want to," Nova said. "It only makes sense to buy fair trade, where my money helps someone other than myself."

Dougherty places his clothes back into his closet — an NFL shirt, a pair of Levi jeans and a North Face jacket.

"It kind of just seems like the issue should matter more to people," Connor said.



BY JESSICA FISHER