

**Photography:
Sofie
Coreynen**

**BRUNO
PIETERS**

**Styling:
Marieke de
Pauw**

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Wenn Kollektionen die stilistische Konsistenz fehlt, weil sie in einer globalisierten Industrie jede Kundin und jede Jahreszeit bedienen müssen, wenn Qualität und Substanz von Luxusprodukten weniger Bedeutung zuteil wird, als exorbitanten Vermarktungs- und Inszenierungsmaßnahmen, wenn Sourcing- und Produktionsprozesse sehr selektiv kontrolliert werden, weil es eigentlich nur noch um Oberfläche, um immer wieder neue und exzentrische Bilder für Instagram geht, ist es an der Zeit, das System von High Fashion kritisch zu hinterfragen.

Einer, der das tut, ist der Antwerpener Designer Bruno Pieters, der sich zunächst mit seiner selbstbenannten Linie erfolgreich und exklusiv am Markt etablierte, dann Chefdesigner bei HUGO wurde und eines Tages realisierte, dass er all das nicht mehr möchte, dass es sich einfach nicht mehr gut anfühlt.

2009 nahm er eine Auszeit, ging nach Indien und fand heraus, was ihn glücklich macht: Ehrlichkeit, Menschlichkeit und absolute Transparenz. Werte, die er in den konventionellen Gefilden der Modeindustrie vergebens suchte. Anfang 2012 lancierte er Honest By, die erste Modekollektion, die den gesamten Sourcing- und Produktionsprozess von Kleidungsstücken für den Kunden offen darlegt, von den Kosten für Stoffe und Garne, über die Löhne der Arbeiter bis hin zu den Margen. Alle Materialien sind öko-zertifiziert, Filter wie 'organic', 'vegan', 'skin-friendly' oder 'recycled' helfen bei der weiteren Orientierung und Kaufentscheidung. Bis vor Kurzem war Honest By nur online zu erwerben, Ende 2016 eröffnete Pieters schließlich den ersten Flagship Store in Antwerpen, um seiner persönlichen Mission und seiner textilen Vision Rahmen und Raum zu verleihen. Ein guter Anlass, um ihn zum Interview zu bitten.

Bruno, can you sum up what made you launch Honest By now five years ago?

Honest By is the result of working in the industry for years and arriving at that moment where I had to be honest with myself. Accepting the reality of the industry was hard for me. I studied fashion design, as I felt this was the best way for me to express myself creatively. But there is a completely different side of the industry that you are confronted with only when you are part of the system. How the raw materials are being cultivated and sourced, how the manufacturing is being handled, how the price calculation is done - there is dishonesty or sometimes even corruption every step along the way. I wasn't proud of what I was doing anymore. That is why I took a break in 2009. I had been so driven by the desire or need for fame, fortune, attention - substitutes for love - that I had become blind to the world around me. After my sabbatical in India, I became more conscious. Every idea I had for Honest By came from my own personal desire as a customer. Once you realise that every purchase you make has a consequence on our society and planet you really want to make more responsible and intelligent choices. And for this you need 100% transparency.

To my understanding, transparency and sustainability should be the core of every modern luxury brand in our days - a natural privilege for the customer who invests lots of money in garments. Why is this attitude still so rare among other brands?

That is something you and every other journalist in the industry should ask them. For some reason all those designers who are either independent or working for large corporations are never asked those questions. Personally, as a reader, I am bored to see designers being asked solely about their inspiration or their youth or music or art. I want to hear them talk about sustainability, transparency and what they are doing about it in reality. What do they know about the fabrics they use in their collection? And when they say, they only work with French or Italian fabrics, I want

TEXT: SILKE BÜCKER





(left) Upcycled vintage Levi's denim jacket HONEST BY. BRUNO PIETERS
Lilac vegan patent leather mules HONEST BY. AMÉLIE PICHARD+PAMELA ANDERSON

someone to reply that cotton doesn't grow in France, that there is no silk in Italy and there is basically no wool or cashmere production in Europe. So what do they really mean with French or Italian fabrics?

I would want to know what they are doing to make the story behind their designs as beautiful as their designs themselves. I think, their attitude will change when press, buyers and clients will start to hold them accountable. The problem is that most media is dependent on those brands for advertisement. And other journalists need to get invitations for the shows in order to be able to do their job. Buyers only care about what their clients want so it always comes down to the same conclusion. The most powerful person that can create change is the client. The customer is at the top of the fashion pyramid. Everyone else is staff. The day we all start caring, as consumers, about sustainability, transparency and the continuation of the human race on this planet everything will change.

Many brands hesitate to become fully sustainable as they feel it limits the sourcing of fabrics and therefore narrows design possibilities. How do you object this line of thinking?

I think we are all very good at inventing or coming up with arguments that justify our choices or lifestyle. The truth is that everything is possible today. Most designers are just too afraid, lazy or simply not interested in doing any kind of research. Others believe, that expensive means good. But that is where they are mistaken. If a fabric is expensive this does not mean it was made in a responsible way. Not at all. In our research we have found out that most luxury suppliers do not know where their cotton comes from or who was working on those cotton fields in India or silk farms in China. We should not forget that the ILO published a document last year stating 270 million children were working around the world in 2016. The fashion industry is one of the most labour intensive industries. So you should know that



Black and white perfecto jacket
HONEST BY. BRUNO PIETERS

child labour in fashion is not the exception, it is the rule. If you do not work with certified products you simply have no guarantee. Today you can wear a 50,000 Euro dress and still be financing child labour. That doesn't mean that all brands are bad, no, there are exceptions and it is about time that we start asking questions and do our research online, to find out what brand is really doing a good job. It isn't easy, there is a lot of greenwashing going on right now. But if you hesitate, just write them an email. And if they do not answer your questions, you'll know.

How much are you personally involved in the production process of your collection?

I am involved in every stage. Our team is very small. There is nothing that happens without me knowing about it. When I choose a fabric, I want to know everything about it. When I choose a manufacturer, I visit him myself before I start collaborating. It is not that I don't trust my team, I just love that part of the process. It is as important as the design. How a product is made



and by whom is for me the only reason why a garment can have value. If you take that away, you are just left with laundry. It's the production story that justifies the price and the reputation of a brand. Is it also kind of relaxing to be mostly done with the fashion industry's system and concentrate on your personal idealistic mission?

I wish it was relaxed. I have never worked harder in my life. Taking part and following the rules of the fashion industry took much less effort, courage or imagination. Sometimes I wish, I could go back to being a simple fool who just wants to be a fashion designer and not think about the consequences of his actions. But that is the thing about waking up, there is no way back. It sucks sometimes, but as you said, it is a mission and I am very grateful that I can fulfill it.

In what way does your professional ambition change your personal lifestyle?

My life is my profession. I try to be the change I want to see, to quote Gandhi. It demands discipli-

ne and patience. And I am bad at both, but I still do it.

Finally some words about the store: You are responsible for design and concept, can you please tell us a bit about your approach and ideas?

I wanted to create a store that would be as simple and honest as the Honest By concept. So all furnitures are custom made warehouse furniture. No frills, no traditional 'luxury' materials such as marble, stone, gold, wood ... I wanted something fresh and atypical. And I am super happy with it. If a fashion girl would ask for your good advice: Which tips would you give her before she heads to the city in order to shop clothes? What shall she be aware of, when does she make a good decision and when a bad?

To a fashion girl I would probably not say anything, I would leave her in her pretty little fashion bubble. But an intelligent woman I would applaud for asking the right questions: Where, how and who made these clothes. *Thank you so much, Bruno!*