

# GREAT BRITISH BRANDS

# BRANDS

2020



*The*  
**Optimism**  
*issue*

COUNTRY & TOWN  
HOUSE

*Vivienne* ♡

# HOW TO BE GOOD

*Being good used to mean going to church, minding your ps and qs and having a pension. Now, it's about saving the world. Join the movement now, says LUCIA VANDER POST*

PHOTOS: VIDEO STILL, HD VIDEO, 2:59. © HEHE/ROYAL ACADEMY

Domestic catastrophe N°3: Laboratory Planet, 2012, by HeHe can be seen at the Royal Academy's Eco-Visionaries exhibition running until 23 February 2020



**H**ow to be good? A simple question to pose but much harder to answer. But let's start with the good news. More and more citizens and consumers really want to be good. Gen Z (born mid to late 1990s), in particular, mind to a commercially embarrassing extent about the impact of their life choices on the planet, on other workers and on the wider society around them. They have forced companies around the globe to form ethical and eco-sustainable policy committees and set up proper protocols and they're vigilant enough to try and check whether they actually do what they say they'll do.

All this has happened comparatively recently. Diana Verde Nieto, who runs Positive Luxury (which aims to identify companies that comply with a whole host of ethical and sustainable standards; [positiveluxury.com](http://positiveluxury.com)), says that as recently as the early 2000s it was hard to convince companies to take sustainability seriously. Today Positive Luxury is just one of many resources designed to help those who really mind about the impact their life choices make on the planet.

Many of us love beautiful things. We still want to buy a gorgeous new dress, a fine piece of jewellery, visit great restaurants and have a well-earned holiday, but we'd like to do it without feeling we're destroying our grandchildren's futures. The problem for the consumer is that while most companies issue large numbers of pious statements

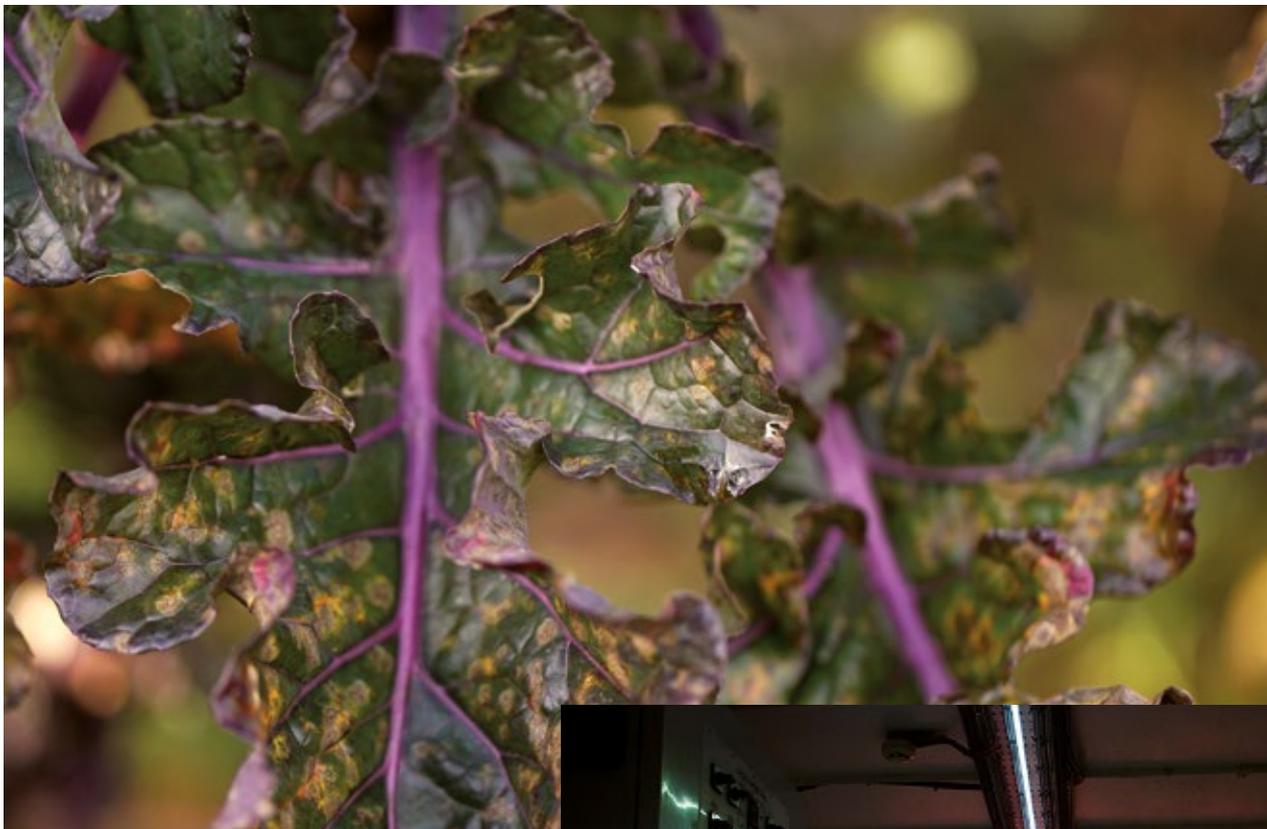


about their practices, it's almost impossible to know which really live up to the standards we increasingly demand and are not just 'greenwashing'.

All this means a new way of thinking. We need to consider more deeply what we buy, what we eat and where and how we travel. Happily, there is now a number of companies that are trying hard to make a difference, adopting sustainable practices, looking after their workforces and generally minding about being a force for good. There are also increasing numbers of organisations, apps and guides that will direct us to them. Here are just a few that can help us all be a little bit (or hopefully a lot) better.



**FROM TOP:** How we grow our food and farm our animals is a huge part of the conversation; Diana Verde Nieto, founder of Positive Luxury which rubberstamps brands leading the ethical charge such as McQueens Flowers

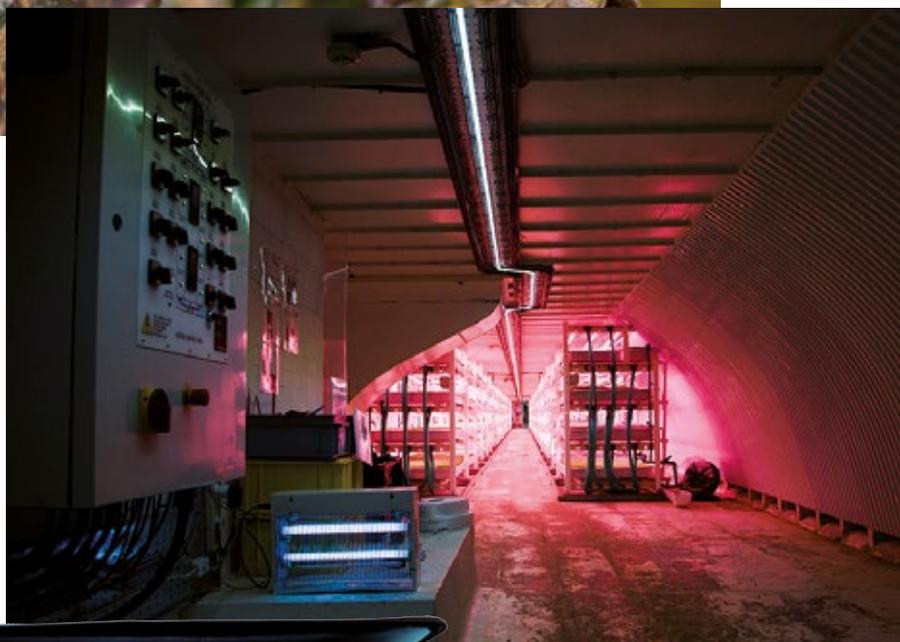


**FROM TOP:** The Soil Association is an invaluable resource for everyone from consumers to producers; Growing Underground is a pioneering food project beneath the streets of Clapham; Loop is coming to the UK in spring 2020 with the aim of reducing packaging by offering a service that collects the reusable packaging, cleaning it and reusing it

## FOOD

The key here is to buy as locally as we can manage and to eat with the seasons. It's also about soil and bio ethical farming. The Soil Association ([soilassociation.org](http://soilassociation.org)) is a fund of information and though much of it is geared to farmers and growers there's lots for the consumer to take on board. It makes it easy by certifying organic food and farming, textiles, health and beauty products, and works with butchers and bakers. They take into account everything from packaging to animal welfare and wildlife conservation, and all unnecessary and harmful food additives are banned. At [growing-underground.com](http://growing-underground.com) they have pioneered a sustainable method of growing fresh micro greens and salad leaves 33 metres below the busy streets of Clapham in London. They use an up-to-the-minute hydroponic systems and LED technology and their crops are grown all-year-round in a perfect, pesticide-free environment. They're all sold to local branches of shops such as Whole Foods, Ocado, Waitrose, Planet Organic and even M&S.

When it comes to the restaurants we patronise more and more of them are buying locally and seasonally, as much as possible from small, independent producers, serving only hormone-free, grass-fed free range meat (note that veganism is not a catch-all solution, we need grazing animals to restore soil health) and wines with as few added sulphates as possible.



And if the restaurant doesn't spell out its philosophy – ask. [Medium.com/age-of-awareness](http://medium.com/age-of-awareness) brilliantly outlines the issues we should consider.

Cutting down on our use of single-use packaging is also imperative. Loop ([loopstore.com](http://loopstore.com)) is an innovative initiative that partners with brands that use refillable packaging and then makes it easy for the consumer by collecting the packaging, cleaning and re-using it. It was launched in the US and France but it is starting a pilot scheme with

Tesco in early 2020 and once it is fully up and running and it gets more brands on board it will offer a brilliantly affordable and easy way to cut down waste ([loopstore.com](http://loopstore.com)).



**FROM TOP:** The Newt in Somerset sources everything as locally as possible, including the staff; *Itmustbenow.com* is driving the sustainability agenda in the travel industry

## TRAVEL

The world is a large and wondrous place and few of us want to give up on ever seeing it, but we all know that carbon emissions are one of the great polluters of the planet. So what to do? Consider holidaying more locally. Many of us have spent so much time travelling long-haul to exotic destinations that we have neglected the beauty on our own doorstep – England recently came second place after Bhutan in *Lonely Planet's* Best Places to Visit 2020. Take, for instance, The Newt (*thenewtinsomerset.com*). Newly opened in Somerset, it is a model of ethical, sustainable thinking and is divinely beautiful as well. Designed by the couple who founded Babylonstoren in South Africa, it is a huge working estate celebrating all things local; at its heart is a deep respect for the land, for everything on it and for the workers who work on it and the community around it. This is a new way of thinking for hoteliers, a way that acknowledges that where there is no ethical basis there is no true luxury.

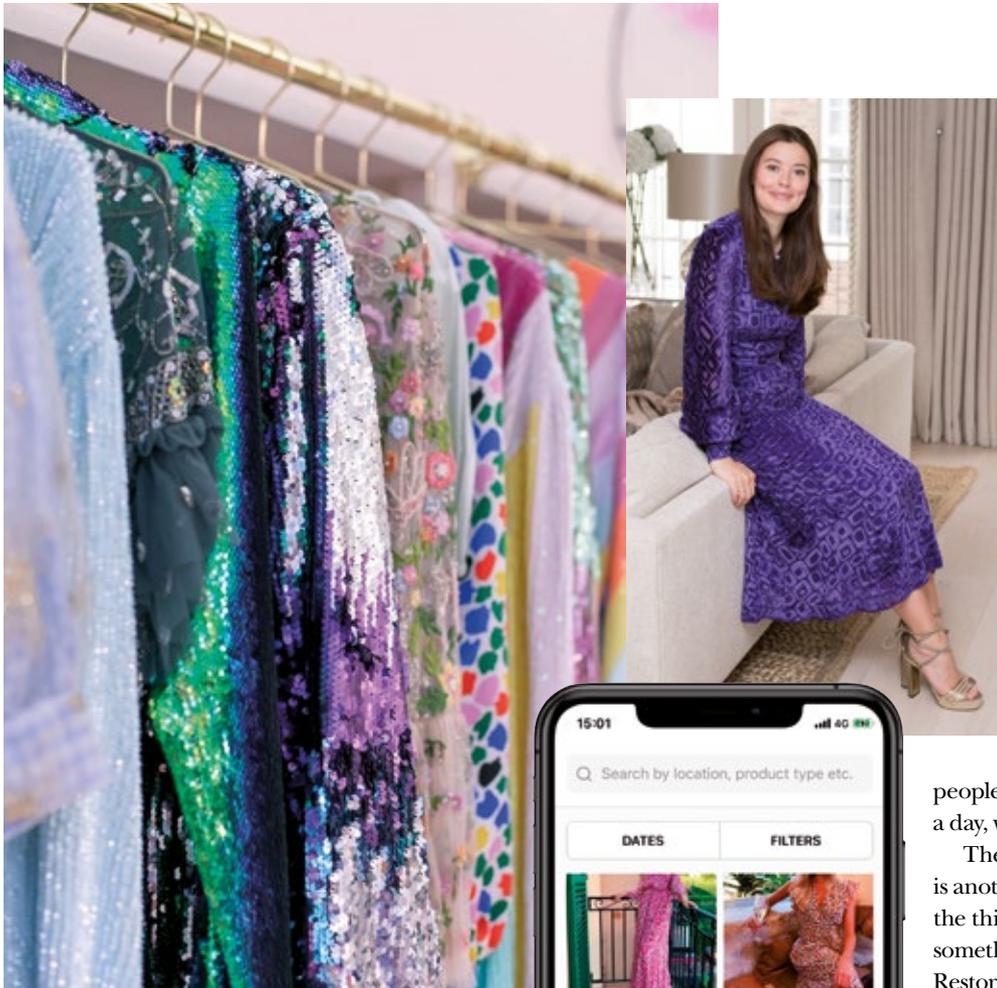
But The Newt is not alone. Many of the great hotel chains have realised that more and more of their customers want to know that when they stay, they are not destroying coral reefs, exploiting local communities, eating food that has been flown thousands of miles. If you must fly setting off your carbon emission helps – as Dr Susanne Becken, Professor of Sustainable Tourism at Griffith University, Australia, puts it: ‘Carbon offsetting is not a solution but only a band-aid that gains us time.’



It is an improvement but will not get us to net zero. That will only be achieved if people fly less.’ ‘But,’ she goes on to say, ‘it is still my view that if we have to fly [or emit carbon for any other activity] it is better to offset than not.’

For those wanting to travel in a less polluting, more considered way, *Itmustbenow.com* is a brilliant resource, spelling out how to offset your carbon emissions and connecting travellers with responsible places to stay.





## FASHION

What we wear and how we buy it pose some of the biggest problems of all. A recent United Nations study found that the fashion and textile industry is the second largest polluter (after oil) of the planet, responsible for some 10 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions per year and 20 per cent of all waste water, and it consumes more energy than the airline and shipping businesses combined. On top of that, in the UK alone, we send about 300,000 tonnes of clothes to landfill. Yet what we wear is so intrinsically linked to who we are that the thought of never buying anything new would not only send many into a sartorial gloom but also cost the thousands of livelihoods that depend upon it.

However, pressure from the consumer is pushing companies to rethink the way they operate, examining everything from the chemicals used in dyeing to making sure the natural materials they use come from sustainable sources, cutting waste in the supply chain. But really we should all buy less and buy better. Few of us can afford to do as *The Business of Fashion's* Tim Blanks suggests when he points out that couture is highly sustainable because disposability isn't written into its creation, but we probably can afford to rent couture or buy second-hand from time to time. Which goes to explain the growth of the good used clothing markets such

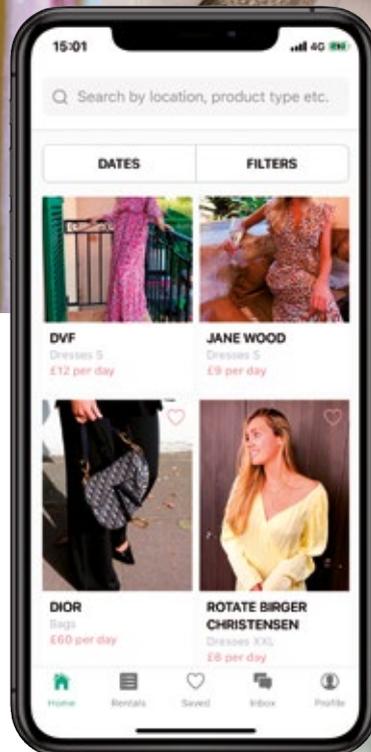
as Farfetch's Second Life (*secondlife.farfetch.com*), The RealReal (*therealreal.com*) and Cudoni (*cudoni.com*), which sell consigned clothing, fine jewellery, watches, fine art and home décor.

Renting clothes is big business in the US (Rent the Runway is already worth billions of dollars) and is beginning to take off in the UK where Victoria Prew's HURR Collective (*hurrcollective.com*) means customers can rent the sort of catwalk 'It' dress for a fraction of its retail selling price – and on top of that it reduces waste as it will be rented out dozens of times. Prew suggests a more mindful way of dressing would be to collect a high-quality capsule wardrobe and then to rent when you needed the more high fashion statement pieces that only ever get a few airings (*hurrcollective.com*).

Then there is new app By Rotation, described as the 'AirBnB of mid to high end fashion', where you can both rent out your own clothes and in turn rent other people's (a Ganni dress, for example, hires for £10 a day, whereas an Hermès Birkin is listed for £75).

There is also The Restory (*the-restory.com*) which is another indication of a new way of thinking about the things we already own. Instead of throwing something out and buying a newer version The Restory will restore and remake shabby handbags, down-at-heel shoes and mend damaged clothing.

The key word in all this, according to Positive Luxury's Verde Nieto, is 'respect'. We need to take more care to read the labels and not always to believe the hype. Few companies are perfect – as few individuals are – but by asking these questions it helps to keep them on their toes. What is certain is that there is a new way of looking at luxury, a more thoughtful, better way, and we all have to play a part if it is to succeed. ■



**FROM TOP:** Hire a piece of couture at the Hurr Collective, set up by Victoria Prew, and know that the piece will see plenty of wears; By Rotation lets you rent your wardrobe and rent other people's in return; don't throw out your Gucci trainers, get them looking as good as new at The Restory

