

Green creator Lydia Bolton is turning unwanted textiles into fun and stylish apparel

Maddyness is collaborating with environmental publication Ours to Save to bring readers fresh perspectives on sustainability. In this piece, Florence Wildblood spoke to Bolton about reconciling personal values with career choices, how to avoid fast fashion temptation, and the ins and outs of running a small business.

From gingham two-pieces made from tablecloth offcuts, to unique sweater vests crafted out of vintage blankets, Lydia Bolton's clothes are a stunning combo of creativity and sustainability.

Have you ever worked for a fast fashion brand before, and is this a route you would consider going down in the future?

No I haven't! I think I'd consider it in the future in more of a collaborative way -

to help a fast fashion brand reuse their deadstock and waste – but less likely in the traditional sense.

That's mainly because the overproduction of fast fashion brands is problematic for both the environment and people whose countries get landed with all our unwanted clothing – not to mention all the other issues, like the treatment of garment workers.

Why did you choose to start up on your own – and what does success look like for you at the end of the day?

I had been brought up in a very eco-conscious household and, in my personal life, tried to shop mainly second-hand.

I wanted to bridge the gap between my personal values and career, by trying to do my work in fashion in a more sustainable way.

I'd become increasingly aware of all of the issues within fashion – from the fabric dye polluting waterways, to the vast amount of textile waste each year. After doing an online course at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, I decided I would set up a brand that remade second-hand and unwanted textiles, as a way of creating my own small, positive change in the fashion industry.

Fast-forward to now and my business is growing organically. I wouldn't call it rapid growth – but as a brand that focuses on slow and sustainable fashion, I think the slower growth is fitting, and means I can really understand my customers and what they like.

Success for me looks like seeing my customers out and about in the LB pieces, which they can feel really special in, knowing the textiles have been given a new life. And from a personal point of view, success is being able to pay my rent from doing what I love!

What, for you, are the pros and cons of running a sustainable small business?

In terms of the pros, I am doing something that I'm not only creatively passionate about, but that also fully aligns with my values. I love being able to do things differently and create a business that doesn't need to comply with industry norms.

As a small business, I can be really adaptable to change, and responsive to what my customers are looking for.

For example, when the pandemic came, I created a series called SEWcial Distancing. It featured easy, DIY sewing projects to do at home; they were all hand-sewing, so you didn't need any experience. They provided some creativity and distraction at a fraught time.

As for the cons... I do basically everything myself, so there is always a lot to do: from sourcing, designing and sewing, to marketing and social media!

Learning how to do the marketing side of my brand took me a little while, as it wasn't an area I had any experience or knowledge in. The way I work with second-hand materials is also much more labour-intensive than working in the traditional way of buying a whole roll of fabric. It means more pieces are one-offs, which is a huge selling-point, but also a downside in terms of the amount of work that goes into each item and the time and cost to create and promote it. This is only ever spread across one or two units.

Where do you source your fabrics from, and how do you choose them?

Since the pandemic, I've mainly been sourcing online, on second-hand marketplaces like eBay and Facebook Marketplace, as I can easily search for specific styles and colours. I also go to lots of charity shops and markets.

When I start a collection, I look around and see what fabrics catch my eye, and

think from there what I could make with them.

For my current collection, I saw some wool blankets and thought they would be perfect to make into wool jackets for autumn.

The sourcing process is quite slow, but is one of my favourite parts of the process. I love searching all day for second-hand fabrics that I think will make great new outfits.

What are some easy and affordable ways for people to be more sustainable in their fashion choices?

Being really intentional with what you buy and trying to only buy things you really want and will wear for a long time!

A good way to do this by making a list of things you want and then waiting 30 days before buying them; often by the end of the time you're no longer bothered about it.

This is a great way to stop impulse purchases, which often are things we don't wear that much. Also, unsubscribing and unfollowing fast fashion brands is so helpful and it gives you less temptation to constantly be buying more new things.

Follow Lydia Bolton on [Instagram](#).

This article comes from Ours to Save, a Substack for climate change activists and amateurs. You can subscribe to its free and premium newsletters [here](#)