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Local Product Feature: “Appalatch: A Return to Slow Fashion”

Story by Corina Heich | Photos provided by Appalatch

Western North Carolina’s textile industry is reinventing itself through innovation. Appalatch is an ethically driven outdoor apparel company determined to revolutionize the industry with heirloom quality, “fad proof” clothing.

“We started out with the idea of making the most sustainable clothing on earth. We’re trying to create products made locally and responsibly with a low carbon footprint that will last,” says Mariano deGuzman, who cofounded Appalatch with designer Grace Gouin in 2012.

Operating from an office at the Echoview Fiber Mill in Weaverville, Appalatch uses all-natural, domestically sourced materials to construct their knitwear for men and women, which includes scarves, capes, shirts, sweaters, and socks. Rambouillet wool from Montana is a client favorite, though cotton and other wools, including Merino and alpaca, are also used.

“We love wool because it’s a renewable resource. It also has natural health benefits, and it’s stronger than cotton. The carbon footprint is very low since it’s a domestic fiber, and processing wool from raw material to finished product isn’t a big chemical investment,” explains Grace.

Beyond its ethical and environmental advantages, wool boasts a number of other benefits. It is moisture wicking, antimicrobial, and thermally regulating with UV protectant and flame retardant properties. It’s also incredibly comfortable and wearable year-round.

Appalatch couples this flexible, durable fiber with a pared-down aesthetic that lends itself to timeless designs. “I don’t think clothing should be given an expiration date. We should try to keep clothes in our wardrobe until they’re tattered and bare, and then repurpose them,” says Grace.

Pared-down, however, doesn’t mean uninspired. Appalatch is redefining what well-fitted clothing means. With the help of a recent Kickstarter campaign, the company purchased a knitting machine akin to a 3D printer. The machine uses individual measurements to create customized wool sweaters in an hour or less. According to Mariano, Appalatch is the first company in the world to make custom sweaters on a large scale.

This innovative spirit extends down to the very fibers used to create these sweaters. Appalatch collaborates with Echoview Fiber Mill to develop new fibers, including an alpaca yarn and a recycled wool and silk blend.

Direct collaboration with their regional supply chain is an important part of Appalatch’s business model. The company partners with Opportunity Threads, a small sewing cooperative in Morganton, to sew their base layers. They also pair with Cotton of the Carolinas to produce 100% North Carolina cotton t-shirts, and Oriole Mill in Hendersonville to create wool and cotton blankets.

By working directly with their supply chain and cutting out the retail middlemen, Appalatch can sell their clothes directly to consumers at reasonable prices.

This fair pricing, along with timeless design, ethical production, and durable quality, forms the foundation of Appalatch's slow fashion mission. "We hope that it becomes an important topic," says Grace. "Disposable fashion is such a big problem and it's hard to start a conversation about how to improve it without a product."

For more information, visit appalatch.com.

Appalatch: A Return to Slow Fashion

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