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Fashion Weeks Are Taking Steps, Big and Small, Toward Sustainability

Copenhagen, Helsinki and London fashion weeks aim to be the greenest of all.

By [Fiona Ma](#)
with contributions from [Julieta Sabino](#)
on April 22, 2019



📷 Looks from Stine Goya during last year's Copenhagen Fashion Week.
Courtesy Photo

LONDON — With crowds come waste and fashion weeks around the world are a big draw for local and international visitors. As a result, fashion weeks are working as hard as brands to go as green as possible, from event production to travel logistics.

[Copenhagen Fashion Week has already pledged to become one of the most sustainable international fashion weeks.](#) The newly appointed chief executive officer Cecilie Thorsmark has in her

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first six months set up an advisory board of specialist consultants, creative directors and politicians to achieve this mission.

“Luckily the industry here in Denmark and Scandinavia is quite at the forefront of sustainability,” said Thorsmark, whose organization chose to stop the use of single-use plastics such as water bottles, uses electric cars to transport guests around the city and hosts them in the city’s most sustainable and ISO-certified hotel.

Thorsmark and her team are always looking to work with more sustainable partners. “We prefer to work with partners whose sustainability efforts are ambitious. We’ve been in situations where we’ve had to decline the opportunity to work with a specific supplier because we didn’t share the same values in terms of sustainability,” she said, pointing out that she hasn’t seen any pushback since she brought forth her sustainability agenda, which was aimed at motivating the industry first.

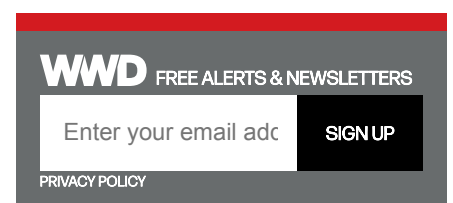
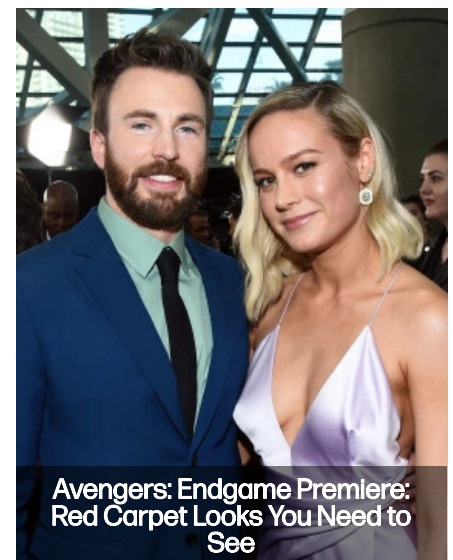
The Nordics are already leaders in sustainability — with Helsinki [Fashion Week](#) also billing itself as green, but with a 360-degree sustainable experience.



One of the runway show locations at Helsinki [Fashion Week](#) 2018. Vaude Valtteri

“Personally, I see sustainability as a general mind-set, not a certain kind of action or movement necessarily boxed in being a vegan or buying only vintage,” said Evelyn Mora, founder of Helsinki Fashion Week.

Helsinki Fashion Week is held once a year, and in 2018, it created an eco-village: Electricity was powered by solar panels, sea water was purified through a circular process and turned



into drinkable water, transportation was provided by Tesla cars, catering was provided with food waste, and hair and makeup was done with sustainable products.

Mora, along with her team, launched the first edition of Helsinki Fashion Week in 2016 after realizing there was no local fashion event spotlighting sustainability. “I wanted to make sustainability mainstream, commercial, beautiful and sexy. I thought it was the most important next direction to take anyway, whether in terms of fashion or its impact on climate change.”

However, just like Thorsmark, Mora realizes there are many challenges that lie ahead. “Unfortunately, in terms of sustainability, on a scale from one to 10, we are at four, but it is an opportunity for growth and improvement of value chains, where the next step is fearless transparency.”


“It’s a complex process,” said Thorsmark adding that, as an umbrella organization for the Danish brands, CFW has to be careful not to exclude anyone.

She’s planning to create a guide for visitors that shows which brands showing at CFW are following the U.N.’s Sustainable Development Goals. “It’ll serve like a city guide, so where a city guide would label sustainable shops or restaurants, we will label shows that are working with SDGs. It will be from a self-reporting perspective to encourage brands to engage with these goals,” Thorsmark said.

In conjunction with this, Thorsmark said that CFW is also creating a sustainable advisory guide for brands to follow during fashion week.


While these smaller fashion weeks are paving the way, more established ones such as [London Fashion Week](#) are also working hard in the name of sustainability.

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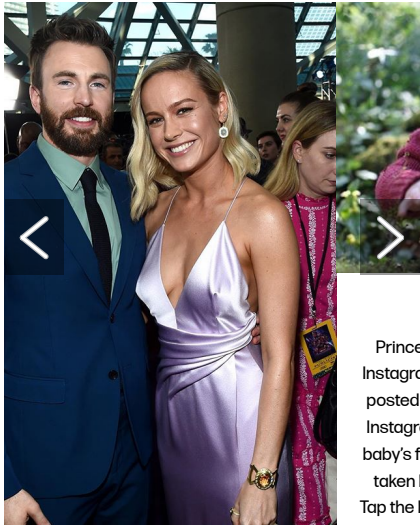


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Queen Elizabeth presents Richard Quinn with the inaugural [Queen Elizabeth II Award for British Design](#). Giovanni Giannoni/WWF

The British Fashion Council is backing many sustainability initiatives such as Positive Fashion, a platform that celebrates sustainable practices and encourages businesses to create positive change, Vivienne Westwood's Switch to Green energy campaign and Esthetica, which supports businesses and their sustainability practices.

"We work to have best practices around waste, recycling and energy usage during LFW. In order to create a real focus around businesses putting sustainability at their core, we established the annual [Queen Elizabeth II Award for British Design](#)," said Caroline Rush, chief executive of BFC.

[This year, designer Bethany Williams received the award.](#) Last year, for the launch of the award, Queen Elizabeth II attended the catwalk show of winner Richard Quinn. The accolade instantly pushed both young fashion businesses into the spotlight and set an example for other brands to follow.

Last season, the BFC also partnered with [BBC Earth and Mother of Pearl designer Amy Powney](#), who has marked all her garments with tags to demonstrate their sustainable attributes. The partners also hosted panels and events during the week, which were broadcast on BBC.

Rush says she is looking forward to continuing to work with BBC and Amy Powney on future initiatives.

"It is clear that in context of the climate change and sustainability imperative, and the emerging public interest in taking action, that more energy should be focused on

showcasing the most creative and sustainable businesses,” Rush said.

While the BFC has gone digital with its registration system, influencer Doina Ciobanu believes more immediate changes can be made, such as using electric cars during LFW and getting rid of single-use plastics.

“A lot of fashion weeks are partially supplied by water companies, with water coming in tiny 120-mg bottles that you drink two sips of — and it’s gone. That could be given so much more thought, to have more sustainable methods of delivering water,” she said.

Ciobanu added that she would like brands to go digital as well. “Not sending a physical invite is amazing, because whether they’re biodegradable or not, a method of transportation is still needed to deliver them. There are a lot of small things that can be improved before getting to the actual production of the collection,” she said.

“At the end of the day, we are an aspirational industry so if we don’t follow these sustainability steps, who will?”

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