

# THE GREAT FASHION RE-MAKE: HOW GLOBAL BRANDS ARE TURNING WASTE INTO DESIRE

---

R S Roy

Images Business of Fashion



**Photo Credit:** GearJunkie

---

For decades, the fashion world thrived on the seduction of the new. Seasons changed, silhouettes evolved, and consumers pursued novelty with relentless enthusiasm. Yet as closets filled and landfills swelled, the glamour of disposability lost its sheen. A quiet reckoning began, gathering strength until it became the defining narrative of contemporary fashion: what if the future of style does not lie in constant reinvention, but in thoughtful re-creation?

Across the world, designers, brands and communities are discovering unexpected beauty in the fragments fashion left behind. Patchwork, once a symbol of thrift, now strides down runways as luxury. Up-cycling, once the domain of craft markets and indie ateliers, is transforming into a high-value design language. Recycling, once the backstage process no one wished to discuss, is stepping into the spotlight as fashion's next frontier.

**What began as isolated experiments in mending and material reuse has since matured into a global design movement, reshaping the way we interpret style, value and waste. As this shift gathers pace, the heart of the story returns to a surprisingly humble starting point: repair.**

In this profound shift, the global industry is not merely reducing waste – it is redesigning desire itself.

---

## From Repair Technique to Design Language

This reimagining of surplus is mirrored in the evolution of patchwork itself. For much of the twentieth century, patchwork was associated with make-do thrift: a knee mended at home, a quilt made from leftover saris or shirts. It was practical, intimate and largely invisible to fashion's centre stage.

The first signs of change were subtle. A small patch on a pair of jeans. A vintage scarf stitched into a new shirt. A designer who chose to honour the visible scars of a garment rather than conceal them. These acts were not declarations at first, merely experiments. But the world began to notice. The irregularity was intriguing, the imperfections poetic. What had been dismissed as "old" or "worn-out" suddenly felt personal, expressive, alive with history.

In that moment, patchwork ceased to be only repair. It became story. And fashion, long nourished by storytelling, recognised a new form of luxury: one woven from memories rather than just materials.

---

## High-Street Giants: Circularity at Scale

If boutique labels and independent designers helped shift the aesthetic conversation, the real test of circular fashion lies with brands operating at scale. Here, the familiar names of the high street are slowly rewriting their own playbooks.

H&M has emerged as one of the most visible architects of large-scale circularity. Its global Garment Collecting programme invites customers to bring in unwanted textiles of any brand to H&M stores, where they enter streams of reuse and recycling. In some locations, the process itself is theatrically visible. Behind glass, machines like H&M's Looop system disassemble old garments, shred fibres and spin new yarn, sometimes in full view of shoppers browsing fresh collections.

**Cecilia Strömblad Brännsten**, Head of Resource Use &



Circularity at H&M Group, articulates the strategy clearly: the company wants to grow "decoupled from resource use and extraction, with products and materials circulating at their highest value."

That ambition is backed by targets: by 2030, H&M aims for all materials to be recycled or sustainably sourced, with at least half being recycled.

The power of this approach lies in its normalcy. Dropping off a bag of clothes on a weekend shopping trip slowly becomes as routine as paying at the checkout. Industrial recycling technology is wrapped in the comforting familiarity of a mall visit. Circularity, in other words, becomes culture.

---



Zara, long synonymous with speed, has redirected its famous agility toward the same goal. Under its Join Life programme, the brand invests in more sustainable fibres, prioritising organic cotton, recycled polyester and traceable raw materials. Simultaneously, Zara's take-back and repair initiatives offer customers collection points and services that extend garment life and prepare pieces for second lives through recycling or resale.



As **Oscar García Maceiras, CEO of Inditex**, notes, the aim is to weave sustainability into everyday decision-making and to “do business in an even cleaner, kinder and fairer way.” For millions of Zara shoppers, the shift is almost philosophical: from a relationship defined by constant newness to one that includes care, repair and conscious circulation.

---

Benetton takes a different, quieter route. The brand has incorporated recycled and regenerated materials into a growing share of its collections and supports initiatives like the Circular Fashion Partnership to capture textile waste and direct it back into production. Its B-Long and B-Care initiatives encourage customers to wash, store and repair garments so they stay in use longer. There are no dramatic slogans here, just a gentle insistence that durability is a radical act in a disposable age.

---

Bestseller, the parent company of ONLY, approaches circularity through materials science. By partnering with innovators such as RE&UP and textile-to-textile recyclers, it is creating T-shirts and other garments from advanced recycled polyester derived from textile waste. The result is fashion that looks entirely contemporary, with no obvious patchwork cues, yet carries a deeply circular DNA.

---

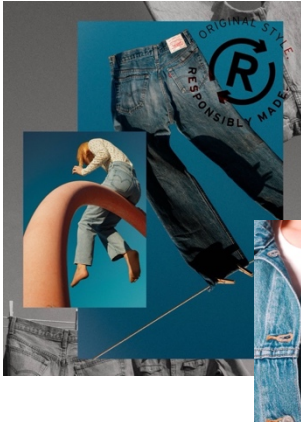


Collectively, these brands send a powerful signal. As **Leyla Ertur, H&M Group's Head of Sustainability**, puts it, “We want to make it easier to extend the life of a garment rather than throw it away. To do this we are increasing the amount of recycled materials we source for our products, offering our customers different ways to enjoy fashion without having to buy something new, and taking back textiles at the end of their life to make sure they are recycled into new materials and products”.

---



## Denim With a Thousand Lives: Levi's and the Art of Repair



No category captures the romance of repair quite like denim. A pair of jeans is a journal in cloth: the faded knee from long commutes, the frayed pocket from countless phones, the rip that happened on a favourite holiday. Levi's, perhaps the most iconic denim brand in the world, has leaned into this emotional territory with unusual depth.

The brand's circular story begins with its in-store collection programmes, where customers can drop off jeans of any label. Through partnerships such as Blue Jeans Go Green, these garments are transformed into insulation for homes and community buildings or repurposed into new products.



**Levi's "Blue Jeans Go Green" denim recycling initiative where any-brand jeans are eligible for drop-off.**

But the heart of the Levi's narrative beats inside its Tailor Shops. These spaces are part atelier, part memory clinic. Artisans patch, darn, resize and customise jeans brought in by customers, extending the life of garments while adding visible layers of personality. The process is collaborative: customers co-design, choosing fabrics, finishes and motifs that reflect their lives.

### Preview:



At the design level, Levi's is experimenting with jeans built for multiple lifecycles. Its Circular 501® uses a blend of organic cotton, responsibly sourced fibres and recycled textiles,

designed for disassembly and future recycling. The brand's SecondHand marketplace refurbishes and resells pre-loved Levi's, proving that denim can gain desirability, not lose it, as it ages.



**Upcycling**  
Repurposing old garments into new items.

In Levi's universe, up-cycling is both heritage and horizon. The jeans your grandparent wore and the jeans your grandchild will inherit belong to the same circular storyline.



## Luxury as Regeneration: Bode, Kapital, GANNI and Marine Serre

While the high street tests circularity at scale, a set of designer labels has elevated patchwork and up-cycling into aspirational luxury. These brands demonstrate that recycling need not look like compromise; it can look like couture.



**Emily Adams Bode in her Chinatown studio.**  
**Photo Courtesy: Dina Litovsky for New York Magazine**

In New York, **Emily Adams Bode** built her label, Bode, on the radical idea that antique textiles could be the foundation of modern menswear. Her garments use vintage quilts, embroidered table linens, lace runners and workwear cloth salvaged from markets and estates. Each shirt or jacket bears the marks of its previous life: tiny repairs, faded motifs, hand-stitched seams. Bode doesn't erase these traces; she frames them. The result is clothing that feels like wearable history - intimate, fragile and yet startlingly contemporary.



**Photo Courtesy:**

<https://www.thecut.com/2019/07/fashion-designer-emily-adams->

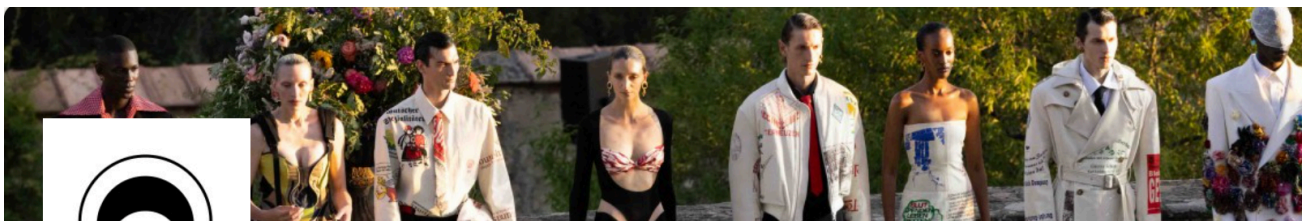


From Japan, **KAPITAL** channels centuries-old traditions of boro and sashiko into coveted denim and outerwear. Originally born out of necessity – mending garments when buying new cloth was impossible – these techniques have been reimagined into a bold design language. In KAPITAL pieces, patches are deliberately visible, stitches are exaggerated, and distress is celebrated rather than hidden. A new jacket may arrive already looking like an old favourite, reminding the wearer that beauty can emerge from imperfection and longevity.



Scandinavian label **GANNI**, meanwhile, presents a different face of circularity. While it does experiment with up-cycled denim and patchwork, its most significant work is in material innovation. Through partnerships with companies like Ambercycle, GANNI incorporates advanced recycled fibres made from post-consumer and industrial waste. The garments look clean and modern, with none of the rustic signalling often associated with “eco fashion.” Sustainability becomes a quiet default

rather than a loud declaration. Levi’s 2020 Sustainability Report mentions how it teamed up with **Ganni** on a for-rent-only capsule **collection of upcycled denim** made from vintage **Levi’s® 501® jeans**. It shows how a brand **invests in feed-stock innovation + premium design** rather than just donation or collection.



## MARINE SERRE

Ecofuturist Fashion

<https://www.marineserre.com/en>

And then there is **Marine Serre**, whose “**Regenerated**” collections have become the stuff of fashion legend. Her ateliers are filled with mountains of discarded textiles – from old silk scarves to deadstock towels and jeans. Each piece is deconstructed, then reconfigured through complex patchwork into dresses, coats and bodysuits with a distinctly futuristic edge. Serre’s work makes the past feel avant-garde, turning waste into sought-after couture.

Together, these labels prove that patchwork and up-cycling can command the highest tiers of desirability. They invite the industry to see discarded textiles not as a constraint but as a rich design palette.



## When Communities Repair: Patagonia and the Rise of Fashion Repair Cafés



**Beyond brands and designers, an equally important revolution is unfolding in community halls, libraries and neighbourhood spaces: the Repair Café movement. Born in Amsterdam in 2009, Repair Cafés have spread across Europe and beyond, with more than two thousand such gatherings worldwide.**

*Photo Courtesy: Ilvy Njiokiktjien / CC BY-SA 3.0*

While they began as places to fix household appliances and small electronics, textiles and clothing have become one of their fastest-growing categories. Visitors bring in torn jeans, moth-eaten sweaters, bags with broken straps, coats with damaged zips. Volunteers – often retired tailors, hobbyist sewists or leatherworkers – patch, darn and repair these items, teaching skills along the way.

France has gone a step further, subsidising clothing and shoe repairs through a “**repair bonus**” that refunds a portion of the cost, nudging citizens to fix rather than discard. Germany’s cafés emphasise visible mending, encouraging people to treat patches and stitched repairs as expressive design elements. The UK and Scandinavian countries weave repair culture into schools and zero-waste communities, turning it into a lifestyle rather than a niche pursuit.

Brands are watching closely. **Patagonia** has long championed repair and longevity through its Worn Wear programme, which operates dedicated repair centres and dispatches mobile repair vans across continents. Garments that cannot be fixed are recycled; those that can are restored, resold or simply returned to owners for many more years of wear.

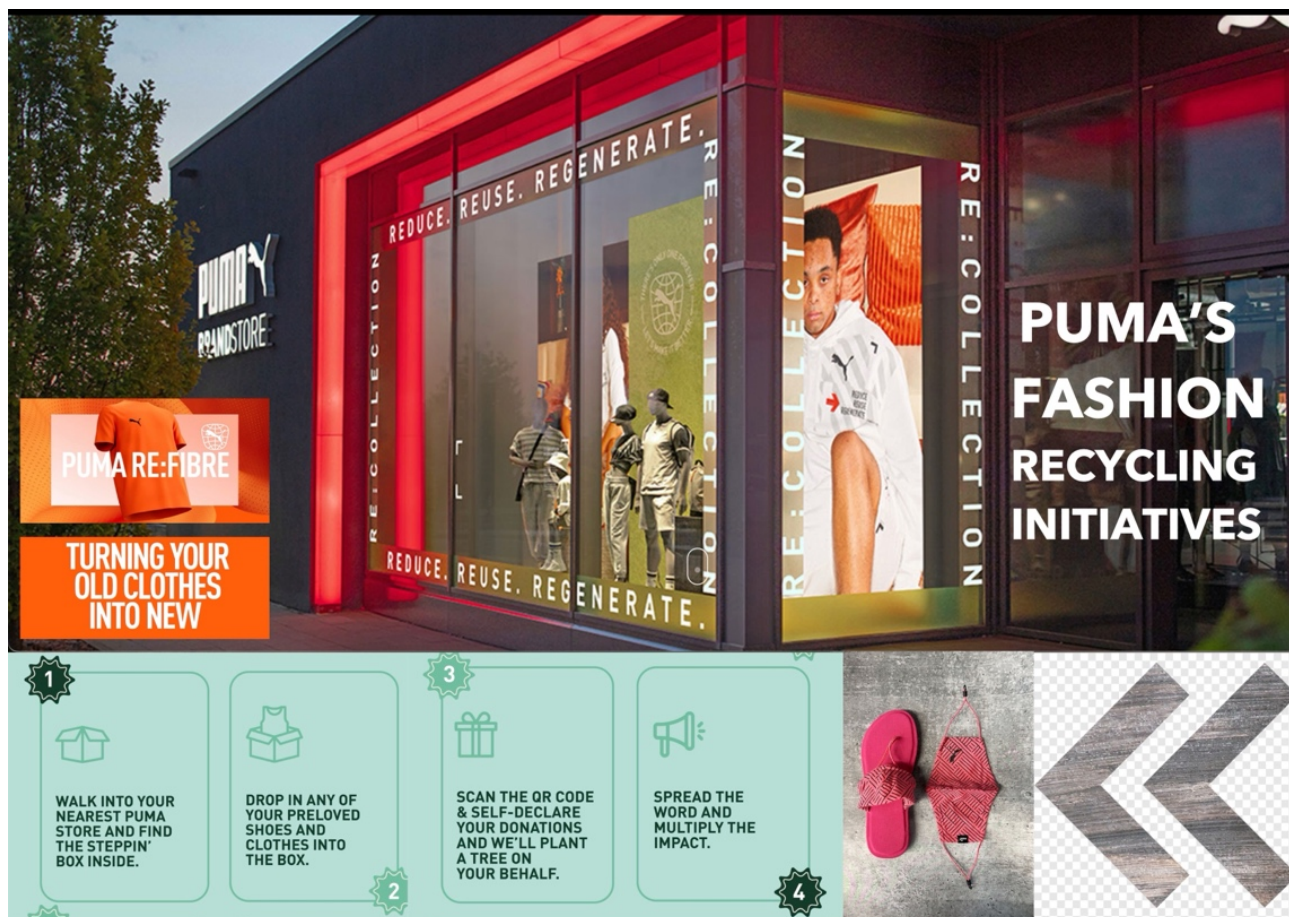
In this ecosystem, circularity feels less like corporate strategy and more like community ritual. The act of repair becomes a small act of rebellion against throwaway culture and a celebration of craft.



## When Surplus Becomes Supply: Puma's Flip-Flop Story

As global brands push the boundaries of recycling technology, and communities reclaim the art of repair through shared spaces and cultural movements, a third strand of innovation is rising from markets where scale, creativity and social purpose intersect. And nowhere is this more evident than in India, where brands are beginning to translate circularity into solutions that are both practical and deeply impactful.

It is in this context that one of the most vivid examples of surplus being transformed into social value emerges – a story that captures the spirit of circularity in its most approachable, people-centric form.



Earlier in 2025, PUMA India announced an initiative that distilled the new circular logic into a single, powerful image: surplus face masks, once destined to gather dust or turn into landfill, transformed into functional flip-flops for underserved communities. Announcing the project, Vishal Gupta, Executive Director - Retail at PUMA India, wrote: "Circularity works best when it is grounded in purpose and executed with discipline." That sentence could serve as the manifesto for fashion's next chapter.

The flip-flops are part of STEPPIN 2025, PUMA's annual clothing donation and recycling drive. Donation boxes appear across stores and offices, inviting customers and employees to drop off pre-loved apparel and footwear. Every registered donation triggers the planting of a tree through a partnership with SankalpTaru, while collected materials are routed to repurposing, up-cycling or redistribution via partners like Clothes Box Foundation.

Here, the store is no longer simply a point of sale. It is a circular touchpoint, where community participation, sustainable design and brand engagement intersect. Surplus becomes supply, and customers become co-creators in a story that stretches far beyond the cash desk.

The PUMA initiative demonstrates something essential: circularity is not only about fibres, machines or supply chains. It is about imagination – the ability to look at surplus not as residue but as raw material for new stories, new products and new forms of community impact. And that mindset is precisely what places India at a unique advantage in the global shift toward circular fashion. The country's relationship with reuse is centuries old, and its ecosystem – from homegrown practices to industrial capacity – is primed for reinvention at a transformative scale.

## India's Circular Advantage

As global conversations around circular fashion grow louder, India occupies a singular position. The country's textile and retail ecosystem combines deep tradition, industrial scale and a vibrant informal sector – all of which can act as powerful accelerators of circularity.

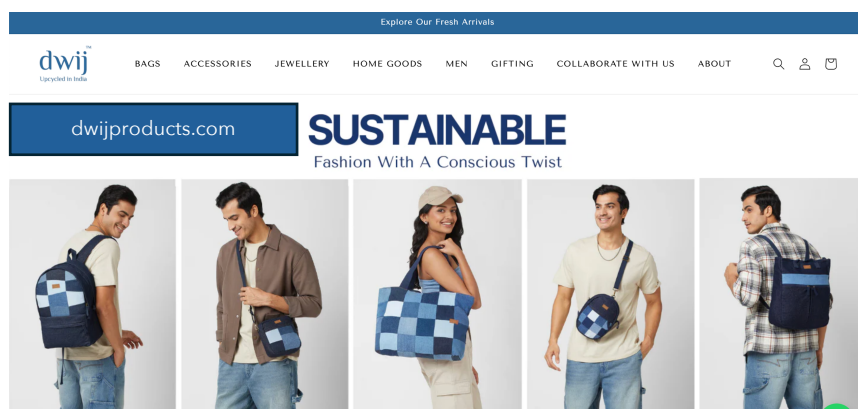


At the grassroots level, India has practised circular fashion for generations. In homes, old saris become quilts through kantha stitching; men's shirts are cut down into children's garments; wedding silks are re-bordered and reworn across decades. Local darzis and alteration shops quietly extend the life of wardrobes, while neighbourhood cobblers resole shoes until the uppers finally give way.

At the industry level, textile giants such as Arvind have begun partnering with global innovators to create fibre-to-fibre recycling facilities, turning pre- and post-consumer textile waste into near-virgin-quality fibres for new garments. Aditya Birla Group has articulated clear circularity roadmaps, piloted zero-waste units and worked with industry bodies to reimagine how Indian manufacturing can close loops rather than leak waste.

Layered onto this foundation are new-age designers and startups treating waste

as a creative starting point. From labels that up-cycle deadstock saris into contemporary silhouettes to social enterprises that train women's collectives to turn textile offcuts into bags and accessories, the landscape increasingly mirrors the diversity and ingenuity of India itself.





## NO MORE: Designing Waste Back Into the System

In a fashion economy driven by speed and excess, **NO MORE** chooses to pause – and take responsibility. Founded by **Praveen Premkumar** and **Priyanka Parswani**, the design-led accessories brand works with pre- and post-consumer textile waste – factory offcuts, surplus fabric, discarded garments and industrial materials such as automobile airbags and seatbelts – to reimagine what waste can become through thoughtful, functional design.

**NO MORE**

nomoreofmore.com

**FASHION, REBUILT FROM WHAT ALREADY EXISTS.**

Presenting the Pocket Cluster Backpacks.

UTILITY IS SEXY PROVE ME WRONG

**NO MORE POP UP AT THE LIL FLEA IN DELHI**

5000 sq ft of discarded Billboard Flex & Cement Sacks Rescued

Seatbelts Salvaged from 150+ Scrapped Cars

Upcycled Dog Beds for 95 Shelter and Community Dogs

Over 2000 kgs Diverted from Landfills

STROBE DRAWSTRING CROSSBODY BAG - NAVY

POCKET CLUSTER BACKPACK - DENIM

STROBE HOBO BAG - RED - 9 STYLES AVAILABLE

STROBE DUAL HANDLE BAG - NAVY - 11 STYLES

Circularity at **NO MORE** is systemic rather than symbolic. Every product comes with free lifetime repairs and a buy-back guarantee, ensuring it never truly exits the loop. Textile offcuts are repurposed into dog beds for shelters, packaging is made from reused billboard flex, and each product carries an Upcycle Score that transparently states its waste impact. As Praveen Premkumar notes, the brand is not about perfection, but intention and accountability – proof that design can care, and that waste can be designed back into the system rather than pushed aside.

Most importantly, India's youthful, digitally savvy consumers are increasingly open to pre-loved, up-cycled and repaired fashion – particularly when it is anchored in authentic storytelling and credible sustainability claims. This same cohort, which fuels resale platforms and thrift communities online, is also shaping how circular fashion gains mainstream acceptance across Indian retail.



## The New Meaning of Fashion

The rise of patchwork, up-cycling and material innovation is more than a trend report; it marks a profound reimagining of what fashion is meant to do. Once, the industry's central question was simple: *What is new?* Today, the more transformative questions are different: *What can be renewed? How long can a garment remain in use? What happens when it falls apart? Can its fibres live again in another form?*

And perhaps most importantly – *how do we keep its story, and its value, in circulation rather than ending in a bin?*

Globally, the shift is no longer theoretical. It is being built through practice. From surplus materials reimagined into everyday utility, to repair, reuse and regeneration embedded within brand ecosystems, a new design logic is taking hold – one that values longevity over disposability, ingenuity over excess, and transparency over invisibility.

For India, this is not simply a global movement to follow – it is an invitation to lead. With its vast textile base, living repair culture and rapidly modernising retail ecosystem, the country is uniquely positioned to demonstrate how circular fashion can operate at real scale: not just in capsule collections or pilot projects, but in the everyday lives of millions.

The world of tomorrow will not silence fashion's appetite for creativity or desire. It will redirect that appetite – toward garments that hold memory, materials that hold value, and systems that hold themselves accountable. In this new landscape, waste is no longer the end of a garment's story, but the beginning of its next chapter.

And the brands, designers, communities and consumers rising to this moment are already stitching together a new kind of beauty – a thoughtful, dynamic, deeply human fashion ecosystem. A patchwork revolution in which every fragment has value, every repair has purpose, and every choice brings style and responsibility onto the same thread.



Doodlage

doodlage.in

