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WHAT MAKES CASHMERE SUSTAINABLE?

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Unlike the other popular knitwear material, wool, which comes from sheep, cashmere comes from goats. As goats shed their coats when summer starts to set in, the fine hairs underneath their thicker coats are combed out. It then gets sorted by hand, and sent away to factories to be cleaned and refined, and the final product is then sold. Of course, not all cashmere is created equal, and not all of it is sustainable cashmere.

As with a lot of natural materials, sourcing those cashmere fibres can have a negative impact on the animals it comes from, and the planet, too. If the goats are sheared too soon in the year, they won't have a thick enough coat to protect them from the elements. A higher demand for cheaper cashmere means more goats, and the land they live on is suffering because of that. More hungry goats means less grass, which can turn that once-green land into a desert. There's a human impact, as well, with questionable conditions for the goat herders, and less pay as cashmere gets cheaper.

But, you can still find cashmere that's sourced from the right places and produced in mindful ways by companies that make an effort to take proper care of the people, animals and environments that contribute. Read on to learn how four of our brands to trust produce their beautiful cashmere pieces.

Veraroad

"The cashmere we use is totally recycled," says Caterina Giraldi, the founder of Veraroad (<https://www.positiveluxury.com/brand/veraroad/>). The brand gets all of their recycled cashmere from local businesses that would normally throw it away. Their unwanted cashmere sweaters are washed and brought back to their natural colour and original raw fibre, and that is rewoven. The spinners and knitters they work with measure their environmental impact, taking into account their water usage, energy consumption and CO2 output. "Our customers love the fact that our cashmere is recycled," adds Caterina. "A long time ago, fashion was about working together and finding ways to create something nice and useful. Now, fashion is about buying and buying new things without thinking about others."

Santicler

This US-based brand using grade A+ cashmere purchased from a family-owned Italian mill. "There are a lot of cashmere suppliers in the marketplace offering varying levels of cashmere qualities, but we've decided to focus on the best," explains Monica Magdas-Miller, the CEO and founder. The mill Santicler (<https://www.positiveluxury.com/brand/santicler/>) works with purchases their raw cashmere wool from herders in Mongolia and Northern China, which is the natural habitat of cashmere goats. The yarn they produce meets the Detox Greenpeace standard, which means it's free from harsh chemicals typically used in dyeing and finishing. "There is tremendous amount of greenwashing and false claims in the industry at the moment," adds Monica. "We want to make sure our partners address both environmental and ethical aspects, from the provenance of the yarn and the way the animals are treated, to the dyeing and finishing practices, to energy and water consumption, industrial waste disposal and worker conditions."

Rachel Bates

Homeware brand Rachel Bates (<https://www.positiveluxury.com/brand/rachel-bates/>) makes the cosiest throws and blankets, all of which are produced in four ply cashmere, which is super luxurious. "Our pure cashmere is sourced from the Upper Mustang region of Nepal where the mountain goats are few in numbers and live at high altitude," says Rachel Bates, the brand's CEO and founder. Because temperatures there drop so low, the goats grow warmer and softer coats. After collecting the fibres in the warmest months, they are washed and spun into yarn. That yarn is then dyed, hand woven, and finished. "Beautiful borders are then added by our highly skilled craftsmen and woman amidst the beautiful, lush foothills of the Himalayas using traditional methods," Rachel adds. She also says customers sometimes inquire about the price of her cashmere pieces. She explains that because it's sustainably and ethically sourced, and the incredible softness the process produces, people quickly come to understand.

Glenevan Mill

Scotland-based Glenevan Mill (<https://www.positiveluxury.com/brand/glenevan-mill/>) uses both Italian and Scottish sustainable cashmere, with its fibres taken from the Hircus Goat from the China and the Mongolian uplands. "It's very difficult to look after the herd in very extreme climate conditions during the winter, and the labour intensive procedures required to obtain a very limited amount of fibre," says Alessandra Marchini-Gunn, Glenevan Mill's founder. "To make one of our medium sized jumpers, we require around 300 to 400 grams of yarn which equals to the yield of two to three goats." Climate change is a big threat to the process, too, because as temperatures rise, the goats are unable to produce those thick coats that lead to the best cashmere.

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