

Greening of retailers

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As Earth Day approaches, green is becoming the new black in New York. Retailers throughout the city are cashing in on the growing crowd of consumers who want eco-friendly apparel and other goods.

Small stores such as Kaight and MooShoes, founded to cater to environmentally conscious shoppers, are ringing up more sales. Department stores like Bloomingdale's are stocking jeans made with organic cotton. Other retailers are quietly changing business practices to become more eco-friendly and connect with customers who care: The Museum of Modern Art Design Store recently replaced its gift boxes with 100% biodegradable versions made of minerals, not trees.

Consumers in their 20s and baby boomers who remember Woodstock values are behind the green drive, according to The NPD Group Inc., a retail trend tracking firm. But the movement, once known primarily for its crunchy Birkenstocks, is taking root with a larger range of customers by going upscale and trendy. A slew of new labels, including Loomstate, offer high-fashion apparel with green roots. Even classic brands such as Levi's now dabble in eco-friendly products.

However, like wearing Chanel's Black Satin nail polish and skull-emblazoned T-shirts, going green may be a fashion destined to peak and fade. Earth Day, which turns 27 this year, has gone through cycles of popularity. Some years, everyone's talking about saving the environment and installing rooftop solar panels, but many Earth Days slip by unnoticed.

"It really should be a lifestyle, but nothing is showing me that this is going to stick," says Marshal Cohen, chief analyst at The NPD Group. "It'll stick for a year or two and then go away."

Green genes

The current eco-friendly fashion movement has ramped up in New York as several phenomena coincided. With Al Gore turning the media crank, global warming has been making headlines constantly, just as more fashion designers have started turning out cute frocks made with bamboo fabric and organic cotton. At the same time, Whole Foods, which presents organic foods as more yuppie than hippie, has become hot with city shoppers.

Operating in the green comes naturally to some store owners. Sisters Erica and Sara Kubersky opened MooShoes on the Lower East Side in 2001 to sell vegan shoes and accessories made with synthetic fibers instead of leather or fur. The growing green trend has boosted business.

"We used to cater to vegans, but with this whole eco-slant, people who aren't even vegetarian are getting into it," says Erica Kubersky.

MooShoes' revenues increased about 30% last year, to just over \$1 million, and the store has become so popular that it needs more space. The sisters are moving MooShoes to a bigger location on Orchard Street in the fall, where their business will be a neighbor to another eco-

friendly fashion store, Kaight. That shop, launched last year, also carries luxury green apparel. Owner Kate McGregor says she's on track to meet her first-year sales goal of \$350,000.

Moral choices

Even shops that don't specialize in green products try to be environmentally conscious. Bottlerocket Wine & Spirit, which opened on West 19th Street last May, displays its 365 wines on shelves made of wood from sustainable forests. The shop sells a small selection of organic and local wines.

"If you start a business, you make choices along the way, and it becomes a moral issue," says owner Tom Geniesse.

On Earth Day, the store will offer a wine tasting and a panel discussion on global warming, featuring officials from the Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense, and Transportation Alternatives, a New York nonprofit.

Some department stores are also into the swing of selling green. Bloomingdale's recently placed a four-page ad in youthful Nylon magazine to tout its organic denim selection, including jeans from Loomstate, Diesel and Levi's.

The green retail kick has attracted the attention of entrepreneur Les Judd, a tour guide. On Earth Day, he will launch Green Business NYC with the first of a dozen planned walking tours that will stop at eco-friendly retailers on the Lower East Side and in NoLIta. He expects about 15 people to pay \$25 each for the two-and-a-half-hour walk on April 22. If all goes well, he will launch tours in other neighborhoods.

"This whole category is exploding," Mr. Judd observes. "It's good for the planet, and it's good for the bottom line."