



VEJA has been founded in 2004 by François-Ghislain Morillon and Sébastien Kopp who creates the designs and looks. VEJA's materials are organic cotton from Brazil as well as rubber from the Arizonian forest and fish skin and leather that otherwise would have went to waste – the animal skins do not come from leather farms, but from farms that produce meat. Sarah Weyers talked to designer Sébastien Kopp for SUPERIOR MAGAZINE at one of Berlin's most popular fashion fairs, SEEK, to find out more about his label and the vision he has, not only for fashion, but also for the market – and the world.

Sébastien, your products are all produced fair with ecological und sustainable materials, as well as they are manufactured in Europe. Is it expensive to operate like that?

No. I mean, it surely has its costs to only buy fish skin and leather that we know where

it comes from to provide transparency, produce in Europe and use organic cotton from Brazil and wild rubber, but we have our tactics and ways to provide an affordable shoe that is completely fair – for every one.

What are these tactics?

We don't do advertising. No magazines, no posters, no commercials. We save all the money that other companies put into marketing and advertising their name and product into the production of the actual thing we are selling, which is not a logo or a brand, but a shoe. Which is why our sneakers cost about the same as any other fashionable sneaker on the market – although it is sustainable.



If you say your shoes are about the same price as “normal” sneakers, why do you think “green fashion” has such a bad image? People think it is too expensive or even just not fashionable at all, why do think it is that way?

Because many brands that popped up and started make a “green” product focused to much on the background and not enough on the looks of it. Socially and ecologically correct products were often not fashionable and good looking, but instead only attracted the older generation that didn’t care about the way it looked, but only about the way it was made. And that changed a lot. Simply these fairs here in Berlin show how much that changed. There are fairs solely for fair fashion and here at “SEEK” and “PREMIUM” brands present their great looking collections – and they have a transparent and amazing background too.

So you would say that the market is constantly changing and becoming more aware of the backgrounds?

Definitely. Taking a look at the last year and the last season is enough: so many new brands popped up and showed that it is possible to be super fashionable and stylish and green. I could name 20 in a heartbeat. Finally, the looks have become just as important as the working conditions and the ecological affects, which is great! Many brands don’t even declare themselves as “green” anymore, because the focus is on their fashion and only when you ask and start a dialogue, you find out that you can wear them without feeling bad about it.

You say that “now people change their attitude”. Your brand has been around for a while now though. Why did you start?

It was an adventure. We were two crazy French guys with 3000 € and wanted to make a difference. We traveled through Brazil and we wanted to find materials that were different and that could make a product that could one day change the game. And we did. We use rubber from the Arizonian forest, tan our leather, which is exclusively from meat-producing farms – that way it is a product of waste and animals are not killed for their skin, but for their meat – with vegetables. So the shoes are green without looking like it!

Who designs your not-green-looking-shoes? Who does your design?

I do it. I am my own customer.

What exactly do you mean by that?

I mean that I design shoes that I want to wear. I design what I like – which is why I can sell my product with confidence – because I really like it (laughs). Our team from VEJA is the customer we try to please first. When we all agree or disagree on something we know it would not be successful. We all have a different taste and a different opinion on things, which is why we try to find designs and looks and solutions that make the VEJA-team happy. That is how we make sure we love our products and can make our customers happy, too!

My last question is how you see other brands. Do you think big brands have already changed their ways of producing and promoting their product or are in the process of doing so? Or do you think that labels that have their stand in the fashion industry are not under pressure?

I think that some labels have realized the importance of sustainability and credibility but don’t do enough to make it “real”. Some declare and pretend to be fair when they are not transparent at all. Some only say that “in the future” they will take care of the problem. But making a statement and pushing your responsibility away from you is not good. Not for the brand, neither for the market. You have to have a vision and talk about things you have already done to make the world a better place, not mention what you might or might not do. Do something and then talk about it. Do something and change the world and then talk about it.

Thank you very much for your time.