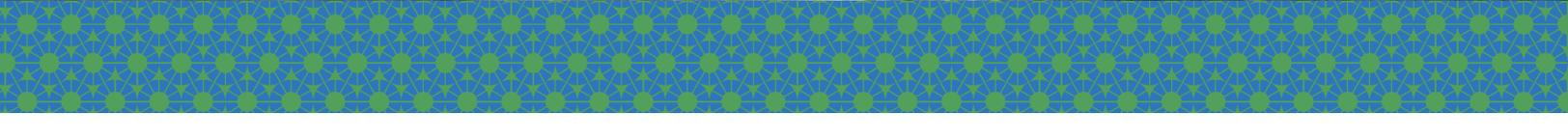


# PLACES/SPACES

## NOON DESIGN STUDIO

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In a world of consumerism, where individuals are encouraged, enticed and seduced to purchase low-price and low-quality goods, Jane Palmer of Noon Design Studio is attempting to wind back the hands of time.

**N**oon Design Studio is a small dye house based in Los Angeles that only uses dyes made from things found in nature like roots, bark, beetle shells and indigo. Jane and her team are creating high-quality products that are completely biodegradable. As Jane says, “Anything we make should be able to be buried in the backyard.”

Before synthetic dyes were discovered in the mid-19th century, textiles were dyed using pigments created from natural items like carbon, the mineral azurite and the soft clay ochre. Naturally occurring pigments are found all over the world, each in their native areas.

In 1856, an accidental discovery became the catalyst for the textile dye revolution. William Henry Perkin, an 18-year-old student at London’s Royal College of Chemistry, was investigating a man-made alternative to a white crystal called quinine, a malaria remedy found naturally in the bark of the cinchona tree in Peru and Bolivia. When Perkin attempted to oxidize the quinine, it didn’t result in the white crystals he expected, but instead a red-black precipitate. When he rinsed out the container holding the residue, he saw that he had produced a purple substance. That substance became the first synthetic dye, later to be named mauve.

Synthetic dyes have woven their way through history since 1858. With the invention of synthetic fabrics like nylon, polyester and acrylic, stronger and brighter synthetic dyes were developed, spawning the textile industry as we know it.





*“People are coming back to an interest in natural dyes now because there’s new modern methods for producing the dyes.”*

Today the textile industry is the largest consumer of dye products, and is now finding itself in “hot water” as governments and environmentalists are becoming more aware of the effects of dye pollution. Rivers and streams in China and Bangladesh are being polluted by dye factory run-off or companies dumping dye in the waterways. “Those dyes and chemicals are becoming really integrated into our ecosystems,” says Jane in a profile produced in 2012 by film director Angeline Gragasin. “There has to be another solution, and I think that natural dye could be one of those other solutions. I’m here to do it!”

On May 8, 2014, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission recalled lines from Target’s children’s clothing and women’s wear because the azoic dye used in the clothing contained a carcinogenic fabric dye. “Conventional dye is made with a concoction of different kinds of chemicals and petroleum products. Some dyes can contain such chemicals as lead, formaldehyde and even arsenic,” says Jane in the video. “There’s documented cases of people getting really sick from working within textile dyeing factories.”

“In the past it was difficult to use natural dyes on a large scale, and I think people are coming back to an interest in natural dyes now because there’s new, modern methods for producing the dyes,” she adds.

In an interview with UPPERCASE, we asked Jane how Noon Design Studio began. The inspiration, she says, came from the book *Cradle to Cradle* by Michael Braungart and William McDonough. “The concept is that all products should be designed from the beginning to be biodegradable. Not even just recyclable. This really blew my mind, and it forever changed the way I make things,” says Jane.

She was also influenced by the resourceful attitude of the people she met while studying textiles at Appalachian State University in North Carolina. “Living there had a huge impact on what I do now,” says Jane. “People there are resourceful because they have to be. Most people I knew grew their own food, col-



lected rain water for showers, repaired their own furniture and made their own herbal medicines. It was an environment of using what was available and not looking to the outside world for more. I loved living there and weaving fabrics with pine needles, or making paper from kudzu vines, or using lemon juice to make hairspray. It made a lot of sense to me then, and still does now.”

After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Jane attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she obtained her Masters in Fine Arts in textiles. After living in Chicago for 10 years, Jane moved to Los Angeles, where she now runs and operates Noon Design Studio. The studio, which has been running for close to three years, has focused on dyeing textiles for apparel designers. Recently, however, Noon Design Studio launched a textile line of their own, featuring handwoven, naturally dyed cashmere blankets, shibori pillows and indigo dye kits for DIYers.

As people become increasingly aware of the serious problems caused by synthetic dye pollution, Jane feels that our only hope is to stop consuming so many products. “I can’t imagine how that’s going to slow down, but it’s the combination of chemicals and toxins, plus the enormous volume produced and used, that’s creating the majority of the problems,” she says. “From a natural dye perspective, it’s the same. It only makes sense if it’s done in reasonable quantities. Noon Design Studio does have some things in the works that I am hopeful can make an impact, such as using agricultural excess for new sources of dyes.”

Jane summarized these thoughts on the Kickstarter campaign that helped get Noon Design Studio off the ground: “Natural dye has a long and rich history stemming from almost every culture. It is important because it utilizes naturally occurring materials to create colour without the use of chemicals or salt. A naturally dyed organic textile is non-toxic and safe for everyone. At the end of its life, it can biodegrade back into the soil without hurting the earth. Almost any natural textile can be dyed naturally, so why shouldn’t it be?” 

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