



dressed by nature

HEMP INFO

Who is HempAge?

The firm Colour Connection, originally active as a fair retailer, merged with the company Hanfzeit in 1999, to form HempAge AG. Ecological textiles, fairly produced and distributed became the order of the day. Above all persisted the desire to restore Hemp material, which had been neglected in the past decades, to the standing it deserves.

A long path began starting with hand woven and plant-dyed Hemp from Thailand, through industrial production in Romania, to the excellent quality we have reached today with our Chinese partners.

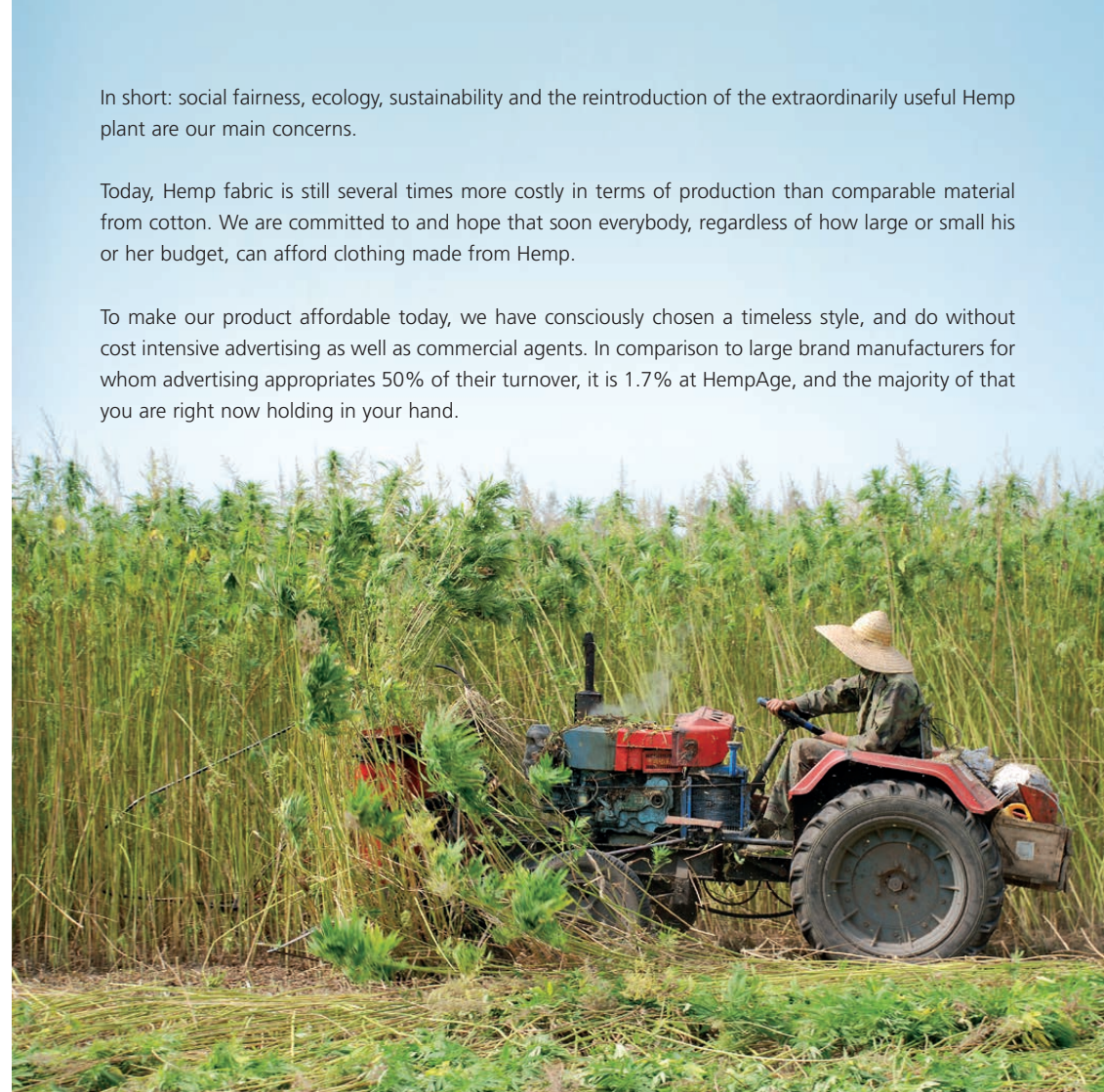
Our commitment is not only limited to the development and marketing of textiles, but also includes research work in the areas of extraction and refinement of fibres. Additionally we work together with European committees dedicated to disseminating Hemp into other fields such as insulation material or fibre composites.

In 2011, HempAge founded a research organization in conjunction with three like-minded partners, to establish a concrete remedy for the technological shortage in the processing of Hemp.

In short: social fairness, ecology, sustainability and the reintroduction of the extraordinarily useful Hemp plant are our main concerns.

Today, Hemp fabric is still several times more costly in terms of production than comparable material from cotton. We are committed to and hope that soon everybody, regardless of how large or small his or her budget, can afford clothing made from Hemp.

To make our product affordable today, we have consciously chosen a timeless style, and do without cost intensive advertising as well as commercial agents. In comparison to large brand manufacturers for whom advertising appropriates 50% of their turnover, it is 1.7% at HempAge, and the majority of that you are right now holding in your hand.



Why hemp?

Hemp as a raw material has had a large fan base for thousands of years, and only recently (Post WW-II) due to the interests of individual business magnates, has been conventionalised as a devil's drug. Therefore, frowned upon in the western world, it is now calling for a Renaissance based on reason.

The plant itself bears excellent characteristics. Due to its agreeableness, it doesn't impoverish the soil in which it is cultivated. Fast growing, it thrives almost everywhere, and as a plant with deep roots loosens compacted earth. The water consumption of a Hemp crop is significantly less than that of cotton, accentuating the ecological balance of this textile raw material notably. Its resistance to agricultural pests is unique. Owing to the diversity of distinctive substances - the cannabinoids - the plant is entirely unattractive to them, and for just that reason it is planted on other fields as a bulwark against bugs and such.

But also the fibres harvested from this remarkable plant are saturated with superlatives. Hemp is the most robust of natural fibres. Automobile manufacturers already benefit from this fact, using it for fibre-composites in interior lining trim and bumpers.

What's more, Levi Strauss made prototype jeans from Hemp fabric, which he found plenty of on sail-boats. The sailing community loved ropes and sails made out of Hemp fibre, as due to their anti-bacterial protective substances they tended not to rot even when kept damp. Additionally, Hemp material is not only able to absorb wetness quickly but also to release it in kind.

So it is no wonder that Hemp fashion offers concrete advantages. Intense wetness absorption and quick release create a cooling wear-comfort, something one would not want to do without during hot summers. Additionally, the fibers suppress the development of odours. If you forego a chemical coating, you have these advantages only with Hemp textiles. In contrast to its chemical impersonators these characteristics are indelibly preserved in Hemp textiles.

Hemp textiles offer a micro electronic charge conforming to that of human skin, comparable consistency and a higher UV protection rate.

Therefore it is easy to recognize that Hemp fans are not led by soaring idealism, but by a healthy dose of human understanding.



To be found all over China up until today:
Mixed cultures with Hemp to protect against agricultural pests

Manufacturing the Products

FIBRE EXTRACTION

Our Hemp is cultivated largely, by small, rural companies in the Chinese province of Shanxi. In the ancient tradition, Hemp plants are harvested (partially retted) and dried.

The retting process serves to dissolve the binding agent connecting fibre bundles from wood and bark (skives). For that purpose the Hemp stems have to be kept slightly damp. This is conventionally carried out in fields making use of dew (field retting), or in water basins (water retting).

Due to the relatively extensive effort, conventional water retting is seldom practiced and it is currently a main focus of our international research to develop a simple procedure that leads to a qualitative equivalent.

After water or as the case may be, field retting or comparable procedures, the Hemp plants are dried to straw. The resulting Hemp straw is then stored to mechanically peel it after the labour intensive harvest. The peeling process separates the bast fibers from the lignified shives, which serve farmers as fuel in the cold season. The fibre bundles are subsequently tied into bales and arrive thus at the spinning and weaving mills.

We do not exclusively process Hemp from small rural enterprises. In principle, the procedure is similar in larger agricultural enterprises, only that larger basins or the less complex field retting may be used. The machines that are utilised are also more sizable and more modern.



Hemp shoot



Still in manual work:
Peeling of the fibres from the stem



Mechanical preparation of the fibres
after refinement



From carded fibres emerge a fibre band

FIBRE REFINEMENT

Upon arrival at the spinning mill, the fibre bundles are split into elemental and fractal fibres. They are then refined in a heated alkaline solution to dissolve the “glue” (pectin, lignin) from the fibre bundles. A new highly engineered purification plant ensures that the environment will not be impacted.

Afterwards, the fibres are washed, dried and are further separated and cleaned through mechanical processing. In various steps of the carding process, the fibres can be separated by length and quality, whereby the longest and finest fibres are re-sorted by hand. It is out of these long fibers that the 100 percent fine Hemp yarn is spun.

The shorter fibres are further processed similarly to cotton, and are found most commonly used in combination with other natural or artificial fibres.



The Fibre band is spun



Finished Hemp yarn woven by modern machines

Through the reallocation of modern technology, we have succeeded in setting another milestone in achieving a higher level of attractiveness of this cultivated crop:

An innovative fibre preparation system implemented in 2011 has enabled a significant reduction in the consumption of water and energy as well as labour output. Unfortunately, due to reasons pertaining to competitiveness we cannot yet present it to you in picture form, but we will certainly make redress for that in a later circulation.

PROCESSING

Not only fibre refinement takes place at our partner company in the province of Shanxi. Here, the fibres are also spun into yarn and the yarn processed into woven fabric. Some parts of the factory operate on a shift system around the clock. The day shift gets a day off after four, the morning and night shift after three. In positions requiring especially high levels of concentration – for example manual fibre guidance – the working hours are further shortened.

Apart from that fact, employee apartments, a supervised kindergarten, a school and a hospital are readily accessible. This establishment has also been audited by the FWF at our request. We are now working in conjunction with our partner to implement the proposed improvements.

All woven fabrics are processed into ready-to-wear in the province of Shandong. Our textiles are exclusively coloured with reactive dyes, in accordance with the demands of GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard). Optical brighteners are generally refrained from.

Dyeing and finishing is fashioned after the GOTS guidelines. Of course the complete production, and all operations are not only certified by GOTS, but also by HempAge AG through regular visits and tests to ensure compliance with standards.



Final inspection of the finished fabric

Ecology

By now, all of our Chinese partners have been certified by IMO, a Swiss Institute, in accordance with the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS). Thereby, the spinning and weaving mill was independently certified while the remainder of the production chain has been taken over by our strategic partner in China. In regard to the certification of raw materials, we have been exclusively processing certified organic cotton, the remaining components like zippers etc. are likewise certified according to Öko-Tex 100.

Nevertheless, there will not be a product certification in accordance with GOTS for HempAge for the time being. There is one reason in particular for that: the raw material Hemp still remains the last uncertified link. Apart from the large financial expenditure of certifying small terraces, it is hard to justify the necessity of it, since Hemp crops have never needed any pesticides or other harmful substances. No farmer would invest financial outlay in something he does not need for a good crop yield. Also, the Hemp that shares a field with other crops for protection against pests cannot be used for textile fibre extraction under these conditions.

In the meantime it would be possible for us to use certified Hemp to a small degree, but we find this measure to be ecologically and socially questionable. Firstly, we would be taking away sales opportunities from the small-scale farmers who have provided us with material in the years of sparse Hemp cultivation. Secondly, the cultivation and processing on the large and certified acreage in northern China cannot be seen as more ecological than that of small Hemp farmers in the direct vicinity of our spinning and weaving mill.

With these and more arguments, today HempAge is working on changing the regulations for the GOTS-certification in favour of Hemp and at the same time enforcing more rigorous quality control. We hope that first you, as our customer and also the decision-making committee, in the medium term come to the conclusion that this is understandable and worth supporting.

The rising emergence of misrepresentation of organic certificates is an area in which we have already preventively acted. In this context we have decided on an Organic Content Standard blended (OCS blended) product certification. This guarantees the tracking of organic cotton from field to finished textile.



Quintessential terrace agriculture in the province of Shanxi



Social responsibility

In 2008 the first audit by the Fair Wear Foundation was performed at our Chinese partner. Shortly after the second audit (verification audit and additional workers' training) HempAge was so convinced of the sincerity and professionalism of FWF, that we became members in 2009. We have come to view FWF as an approving authority to be taken seriously, in terms of the socially contracted production of textiles. That is not only our opinion; the number of members is growing strongly and steadily.

What differentiates the FWF from many other endorsers and associations, is their "Multi-Stakeholder Approach", which is also lived during a company inspection. As such, audits are generally conducted together with local NGOs, whose members see themselves as being committed to the matter itself, and not only through freelance assessors who are contracted and paid directly by the company being inspected.

Since we have made every effort to have all subcontractors audited as proactively as possible in the last years, HempAge can assert that it has been almost completely monitored by the FWF. Therefore in light of this development, we are especially pleased to be able to publish the FWF-logo for the purpose of communication.

The results of the examinations are protocolled in the social report every year and are released on the home page of the FWF. With this, transparency is created, making it possible for everybody to picture the current standing of HempAge in terms of social responsibility.

With great pride, we have heard of our Chinese partner's decision to become a member of the FWF as well. They joined the FWF as a "factory member" in 2011. More evidence, which stands against general medial coverage and testifies, that one can produce socially fair in China.

It is a beginning – in the end as we all know, it is the consumers who decide how it will develop.



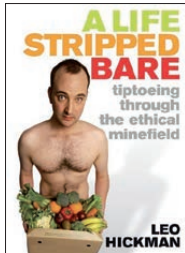
Our partner company in Shandong – this is where the finished garments are made

Literature we suggest you should read



LUCY SIEGLE

To Die for: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World
Harper Collins Publishers, 2011



LEO HICKMAN

Life Stripped Bare: My Year Trying To Live Ethically
Transworld Publishers, 2006

JACK HERER

The Emperor Wears No Clothes:
Hemp and the Marijuana Conspiracy
AH HA Publishing, 2010





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Hemp fashion by HempAge can be found at us:

