ZERO-WASTE FASHION STARTUP TAKES A CUSTOMER-FIRST APPROACH

Shelly Xu Design first asks customers for feedback on garment designs, and what they want and will buy is relayed back to the manufacturers

Spotted: The sustainable fashion startup, Shelly Xu Design, aims to provide clothing that is accessible, versatile and creates zero-waste by using as much of the material as possible, without producing any textile scraps.

Shelly Xu, the company’s founder and a designer and former creative lead at Instagram, hand-makes and tailors all of the designs in her Harvard dorm room. The project is a part of this year’s Harvard i-lab Summer Venture Program. Xu, who studied minimal design and production, was inspired by the Japanese kimono. Throughout the program, Xu will test the scalability of her designs using on-demand manufacturing.

Unlike traditional fashion companies, Xu’s manufacturing process begins with the consumer. The team first asks people for feedback on garment designs, and what customers want and will buy is then relayed back to the manufacturers.

The startup sources its textiles from FABSCRAP — a New York City nonprofit giving the fabric a second life by taking upcycled fabric from interior designers, fashion designers and manufacturers. Xu also avoids inventory waste by partnering with on-demand manufacturers, who won’t produce clothing unless it’s already been sold on their website.

Within the next five to 10 years, Xu hopes to bring manufacturing in-house, so her designs can be made from start to finish using automated garment manufacturing technology. Currently, items sell for around €170. Once the garments are scalable, they will ideally cost under €60, so that more people can afford zero-waste design.
Takeaway:

The fashion industry produces 92 million tons of solid waste each year. However, sustainable fashion is still the underdog. A report by eCommerce personalisation platform Nosto showed that 52 per cent of consumers want more sustainable practices within the fashion industry, but only 29 per cent would pay more for sustainably made versions of the same items. Which is why Xu believes that if fashion is to slow down, there needs to be a fundamental societal shift “from having sustainable fashion as a compromise to having sustainable fashion as second nature for people”.