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Cornell Alum's Clothing Line Thrives In Downturn Market

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After six post-undergraduate years of waking up at 5:30 a.m. to go to work on Wall Street for Morgan Stanley, Cornell alum Christine Marchuska decided that it was time to buck the trend of all work and no play and join the sustainability movement.

Marchuska, a line of clothing that "embodies the present and the future concerns of our planet" was created in May. Taking a cue from basic all-American clothing line, American Apparel, Marchuska uses only earth-friendly fabrics and packaging. The cost is a little more than American Apparel, but the environmental mission is far worth while. The first product, mseries t, launched in July. The mseries t is a trendy unisex white tee made of a blend of cotton and modal with epaulettes at the top of the shirt's frame. Each t is packaged into a cylinder made of recycled materials that can be reused for other purposes.

Christine started the clothing line with her older brother Justin. Coming from a family of entrepreneurs from Vestal, Christine and Justin launched a clothing line not only dedicated to using eco-friendly fabrics in the latest trends, but with a portion of the proceeds going to different charitable organizations.

"We started with the idea back in January," said Christine from her Manhattan apartment. "We launched our web site at the end of July. The vision as a whole is like American Apparel with an edge. Basically, we wanted to create a better cut and trendier fit on basic clothes. We chose launching with the upscale white T-shirt because it's super soft, has much more of a European type cut versus a basic t. It's a really good fit with a sustainable blend of fabric." The mseries T will be available September 15 in pristine white and noir black for both men and women. Visit www.marchuska.com to order.

Christine's eco-friendly clothing line was always in the back of her mind. Majoring in finance at Cornell, Christine knew she wanted to start a business that helped the environment as well as give back to communities and charities nationwide.

"At Cornell I was learning more and more about the environment and the need for more sustainable types of items, especially with clothing," said Christine. "As recently as December I still had my job working for Morgan Stanley and my brother has a business with our oldest brother doing real estate and construction in the Binghamton area. I knew I really wanted to focus on this eventually, but there was never enough time between the two of us."

Christine wanted to combine her upstate roots with a background in finance to create the line. She began manufacturing some Marchuska items out of China thanks to a contact in Endicott who was involved with the Endicott-Johnson shoe business. Christine knew the contact in China, making sure there was no child labor or anything of that nature involved. Christine and Justin are now in the process of making everything out of NYC, everything from sourcing the fabric to getting samples and patterns made to manufacturing the product right out of the Big Apple. According to Christine, the eco-friendly fabrics are made primarily in Asia, but a lot of the companies are based in the New York, Los Angeles, Canada

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By October, the majority of Marchuska products will be available. Everything from scarves to dresses and tailored T-shirts and pants will be offered.

"It's hard to get in stores when you have few products and a new company in the worst economic downturn," explained Christine. "We're looking to sell locally and also on the web site. In the next few weeks we should be churning it out and getting it on the website, at least. We're doing this as a grassroots effort without any big public relations or marketing firms sponsoring us right now."

Christine said she will be selling the line from her boutique, My Boutique, in Binghamton as the first physical location. She's also looking to continuously generate buzz so she can find a place to sell the line in Ithaca as well.

"The line is for everyone who is younger and concerned with sustainable products, ideas, and charities," said Christine. "Right now, the majority of our audience fits right in."

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