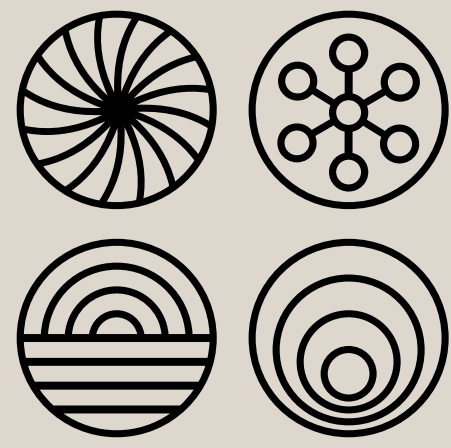


FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

CASE STUDY:
BIRDSONG





CASE STUDY

BIRDSONG

Founder/Owner	Sophie Slater
Type	Social enterprise / Making clothes for women who dress in protest
Sector	Womenswear
Established	2014
Location	London
Size	Micro
Website	birdsong.london

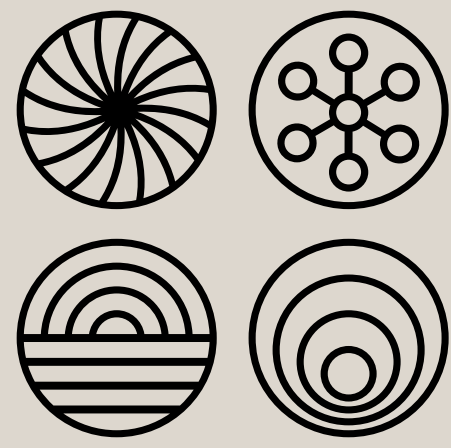
"We're always willing to learn, we're not completely wedded to something unless we know it's got really good social impact that we can completely see."

"Every person we work with is obviously named, or their face is shown in some way, whether that's through Instagram or on videos on the website. We have got loads of amazing video content of everyone. All our packing and post is done by adults with learning disabilities at another charity."

"I never want us to be like a factory where people have really tight deadlines. Whatever happens, we want the women we're working with to have time for a cup of tea when they want one."

BIRDSONG





CASE STUDY: BIRDSONG

KEY TAKEAWAYS

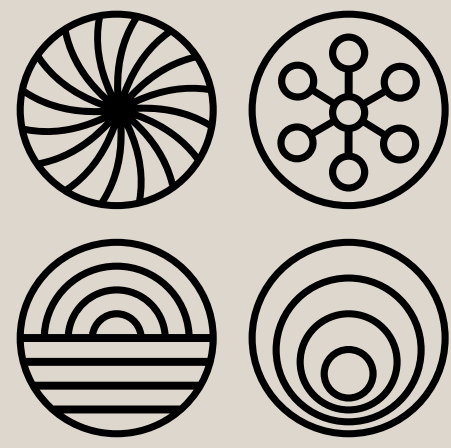
Strong supply chain focus to design and produce in the most transparent, ethical and sustainable way possible.

Fair wages for their skilled but often marginalised production team (e.g. women facing intersectional challenges, knitters in a care home).

Fashion can exemplify social justice in practice
- Birdsong value equality, choosing own goals and foregrounding fulfilling livelihoods.

Direct-to-customer model enables endorsement, understanding of fair production methods and regular feedback on products.





OVERVIEW



Birdsong is a feminist fashion brand founded on the ambition to make fashion for women who expect more than a surface interest from their wardrobe. For Birdsong this means that all their designs and products are made in line with their code of ethics and sustainability. These practices are accountable in the most transparent way possible, paying fair wages throughout the production process to their talented production team that includes women who often face complex employment barriers, in collaboration with social enterprise Fabric Works, through to skilled knitters living in care homes.

With backgrounds in fashion design, social justice, modelling, care working, charity work, and a shared interest in fashion, Sophie and her founding partner Susanna Wen, began Birdsong as a means to connect their concerns and interests. First noticed for their 'No Photoshop' statement T-shirts, they have a deep commitment to addressing social injustice, particularly in the UK, and a growing understanding of environmental devastation linked to fashion. Their work demonstrates the power of fashion to provide fulfilling livelihoods, great clothes and means for direct change.

Birdsong's social approach to design and business means they are creating new models for living and working. This approach draws on collaboration, traditional fashion skills and inclusion of communities not usually associated with fashion production, sometimes involving skills development as part of the production process. They have

created a local production network in London, bucking the trend that has seen London drained of most of its fashion manufacturing capability.

Political in their nature, Birdsong are upfront, clear and organised in how they work with their distinctive groups of makers. Their direct-to-customer model creates a feedback loop that endorses their products, gives them valuable insights, and ensures that customers know what they are buying and what they are buying into. This clarity extends from fairness and recognising the contribution of makers and customers, to the selection criteria they use for the product design, material and manufacturing. They set out to create a blueprint for the fashion sector, not as a directly replicable model, but one that others can learn from, by showing that fashion does not have to be exploitative and wasteful.

"Many women's organisations want to have a social enterprise arm, but they're completely divorced from the fashion industry. So, there's a massive gulf between the two worlds. And then there's a lot of women in this country, because we used to produce everything here 20, 30 years ago, women a bit older, who have got amazing skills but their factories have shut down."

BIRDSONG

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With special thanks to the many Fostering Sustainable Practices project partners, participants and Advisory Board members.

Design by: Studio LP

The Fostering Sustainable Practices project investigates creative practices in design-led fashion micro and small enterprises (MSEs) as an evidence base for change towards a more sustainable fashion industry. Project findings are underpinned by two-and-a half years of work with more than forty fashion MSEs, who demonstrate sustainable prosperity in and through Fashion.

This collaborative research is led by Centre for Sustainable Fashion, a University of the Arts London research centre, based at London College of Fashion. Project partners are based at London College of Fashion, The Open University and Middlesex University's Centre for Enterprise and Economic Development Research (CEEDR; a partner in Surrey University's Centre for Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity).

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