

▶▶ RETAIL SUCCESS

BANK & VOGUE

Going Way Beyond The Rag Trade

Bank & Vogue call themselves vintage hoarders whose main goal is to reduce waste in the fashion industry. They were in the rag trade long before it was fashionable. The Ottawa-based company has quietly become a significant global textile recycler over the last two decades. By keeping a mountain of used apparel out of the waste stream the company has elevated the rag trade into a virtuous and profitable circular system.

Bank & Vogue collects pre and post-consumer textile waste from all over the world and then ships it to India where it is sorted either for wholesale re-sale or for re-processing as is the case with recycled woolens sent to mills in **Prato**, Italy. The company's uses multiple channels to get up-cycled clothing used by major brands, re-sold at leading department stores, wholesaled to small boutiques, or sold directly to consumers through their own retail channel, **Beyond Retro**.



Suede drawstring backpack made from upcycled jackets
Courtesy of Beyond Retro Wholesale



Mills in Prato used post-consumer wool rags to produce recycled wool textiles for decades
Photo : K. Mogg

Virtuous Collaborations

Bank & Vogue deserves recognition for its recent partnerships with significant international players. At the 2019 WEAR conference, co-founder **Steven Bethell** rather modestly announced collaborations with global footwear brand **Converse**, and the **John Lewis Partnership**, owner of large UK department stores.

The John Lewis Partnership launched a new 'BuyBack' pilot program last fall. 'My John Lewis' members earn a credit when they return up to three men's or women's clothing items purchased from John Lewis within a year. Customers can be confident that the returned items do not end up in landfill, which is a concern of consumers who donate to charitable bins.

"We've partnered with Bank and Vogue, one of the largest traders in used goods and a global leader in the circular economy of textiles for over 20 years. They're also the parent company of Beyond Retro, Europe's largest vintage chain, who will be collaborating closely with us on our exciting BuyBack service." ~ johnlewis.com

Beyond Retro resells or remakes the items returned to John Lewis or diverts them to other reprocessing. The pilot currently runs at the John Lewis Westgate store in Oxford, a university town with plenty of younger eco-conscious customers. The value of an item is preserved much longer and when it is no longer wearable it is remade into another product or directed into the recycling stream. This approach to re-sale is designed to keep the customer in a virtuous circle with the retailer. Time will tell if the small value of the store credit and do-good incentives are sufficient. In any event, the resale trend is something many department stores are developing.

Selfridges on Oxford Street opened a resale popup with **Vestaire Collective**, a French fashion reseller and **Liberty of London** has long had **Designer Vintage** fashion and accessories curated by **Stelios Hawa**. Here in Canada, **Hudson's Bay** has subtle space in select locations since 2014 to **LXR & Co.**, a Montreal-based reseller of vintage designer handbags and accessories. In November, **Nordstrom** extended its partnership with **Rent the Runway** for drop-off kiosks in 29 locations and contributes inventory. The companies are working together to develop an exclusive product for rental and re-sale.



Up-cycled denim Converse Chuck 70 sneaker
Courtesy of Bank & Vogue

Circular Kicks

In October, Steven Bethell announced a new **Converse All Star Chuck 70 sneaker** made with 100% post-consumer denim sourced by Bank & Vogue. Converse was founded in 1908 and introduced the first mass produced basketball shoes in North America. Nike bought Converse in 2003 and has presented several brand revivals since. **Converse Renew** is a recent effort to make products more sustainable while staying true to the brand. Since canvas was used in the original design, up-cycled denim was a good substitute. Other sustainable sneaker variations were added in 2019.

The **Chuck Taylor Renew Canvas** made from 100% recycled polyester from used plastic bottles was launched at a warehouse in Coal Drops Yard in London. **Seen Displays** designed a sustainable retail popup for the event that was repurposed for retail at **Selfridges**, **Foot Locker** and **Office**. In 2020, Converse plans to introduce Chucks created from the textile waste of other Chucks reusing 40% recycled cotton canvas scraps.

Beyond Resale to Wholesale Vintage

Beyond Retro is Bank & Vogue's retail division. In 2002, founders, **Steven** and **Helene Carter Bethell** opened their first shop in Brick Lane's vintage mecca in the East London Shoreditch area. The Beyond Retro vintage retail concept has grown to be the largest clothing reseller in UK and Sweden with nine stores and an e-commerce site.

Beyond Retro has since created **LABEL**, their own line of apparel and bags made from 100% upcycled clothing. The collection starts by sorting and selecting high-quality and fashionable post-consumer textiles. Designs are created for new on-trend items, which are then produced in India.

In addition to selling LABEL apparel and bags at their own stores, the company went beyond by launching a wholesale initiative at the **Pure London** trade show in 2016 supported by a wholesale website (beyondretrowholesale.com) for boutique retailer sourcing.

"We are vintage hoarders at heart with one main goal, to reduce garment wastage in the fashion industry. Each year we turn hundreds of prototypes into reality from our factory in India. Over 100,000 pieces of upcycled clothing arrive at our London headquarters before being shipped to our wholesale customers and Beyond Retro stores."

"We love contributing positively to how clothes are bought. Our way is a sound environmental choice. With more independent retailers selling our product, we can have an even greater impact on the environment."

~ Steven Bethell to the **Retail Gazette**



MyJohnLewis BuyBack pilot program launched with Bank & Vogue
Courtesy of John Lewis Partnership



Frame Awards nominee Seen Displays collaborated with Converse to design a global campaign launching Chuck Taylor Renew Canvas - 100% recycled polyester
Courtesy of Seen Displays