

Exclusive

Wolford

UNVEIL THE FIRST ENTIRELY ECOLOGICAL BRA



Wolford's action plan started over 3 years ago 'How to transform your lingerie into a salad' when it signed a partnership with Bluesign Industries (a global network encouraging sustainable production processes). Fast forward to February 2017 and Wolford were able to show the fruits of their research and development in Paris with a first prototype. The brand is planning on merchandising its first eco-friendly garments for SS2018, followed by a complete collection by SS2019 and the goal is that 50% of seasonal collections will be produced in entirely sustainable materials within 10 years. Pamela Scott travelled to the company's Austrian Bregenz HQ to find out more about this revolution in lingerie and legwear from one of the world's most renowned producers.

Andreas Röhrich is the quiet spoken man very much behind these latest developments in his role as Director of Product Development & Textile Sourcing, in charge of some 55 research and development staff. "We have been working on this particular project for 3 years and it is only part of a programme of innovations that Wolford is involved in (other include the 3W Bra). We have been focussing our expertise and resources to rethink and redesign our core collections with the Cradle to Cradle" approach that could help generate nutrients in multiple biological or technical cycles."

And whilst the process is of nature a scientific one, Andreas believes passionately that Wolford must be a pioneer in this field and bring to the market, products that are good for their consumers and good for the environment. "I believe that more and more consumers will be willing to learn and understand the impact of their choices, it happened for food. We have learnt to read the labels and understand which ingredients we are putting in our mouths, we will learn to do the same with our clothing, especially with items such as lingerie and hosiery that are so close to our skin."

The Cradle to Cradle" approach for Wolford means that the company would move from a linear to a circular production cycle and Andreas is already working with 15 other companies located close to Wolford who are producing Cradle to Cradle" individual components (the COIN Consortium).

"We live in a world with finite resources with an ever increasing population..."

Andreas is passionate about Wolford's role in creating truly ecological sound products. "We are always trying to fulfil the stated aim of Wolford ... our products should mimic the skin as closely as possible. We are known for high quality, durability and comfort in our product portfolio but we live in a world with finite resources with an ever increasing population so our whole approach towards production processes must change."

"Every element of the garment make-up and production – yarn, ribbon, fabric, fastenings, dyeing ... has had to be rethought and of course, these demands have resulted in modifications to our own production equipment."



Andreas Röhrich



We are dealing not just with a biological circle for sustainability and recyclability but also a technical circle to be able to produce 100% ecologically sound legwear and lingerie that is also fashionable and stylish and ultimately, profitable for Wolford.”

Andreas is backed 100% by CEO, Ashish Sensarma, in this new generation of Wolford Textiles. He comments: “Wolford is a heritage brand and our goal is to make the brand more relevant and desirable for today’s consumers who are well aware of sustainability and recyclability issues. And whilst we are convinced that our product is of top quality and the brand positioning is premium, there is a duty on Wolford to lead the way with environmental issues that cannot be ignored.

Our aims for Wolford remain consistent – to duplicate the feeling of your own skin with our products; to keep our products relevant to both our loyal and new customers but to retain the true essence or DNA of Wolford. What I always ask myself when considering Wolford’s role is ‘What would the world miss if Wolford was not here?’ At the moment we are working on new stores with our new concept, new social media platforms and new communication programmes – we are giving consumers a whole new reason to fall in love with Wolford again. Ability brings responsibility: it is important to take the lead and serve as catalyst to accelerate the change needed in the fashion industry.”

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Andreas continues: “For the biological cycles both the lingerie sets and tights will be made out of Modal (Lenzing’s cellulosic fibre derived from sustainable forestry), a specially modified oil based biodegradable polymer (infito® from Laurenmühle) and a biodegradable elastomer (Roica™ EcoSmart). At the moment we have been able to create 4 colours which fulfil the biological circle. The dry touch given by infinito® has had extremely high approval for feeling on the skin and durability. Of course lingerie is one of the most complex of garments as it has so many components and we are working on each and every one of these components to be made of biodegradable materials sourced in Europe.”

And this product development is very much a European affair with production sites in Austria and Slovenia as well as recycling and composting with future extension to global integrated systems.

Andreas says there is still a large task ahead: “Wolford currently use about 400 tonnes of yarn a year which is really nothing in world terms but we believe with this concept we can be a catalyst for other companies.” And whilst Wolford is recognised as an innovator, Andreas realises that the consumer must ‘come along for the ride’. “The Cradle to Cradle® concept and certification does require the active role of the consumer. They need to realise they are buying something which is completely non-toxic so the information and expertise we are gaining must be easily and freely available. As mentioned we are working on a small collection first – lingerie and legwear – and we are turning our attention to the packaging which must fulfil the promise of the product within in terms of quality and recyclability.

I believe it is important that companies that are part of the problem {we face} take responsibility and take action to find solutions, even when it means to embark on a journey that is not going to be fast, easy or cheap. We have taken the challenge to find a solution and are committed.”



Inside Wolford’s Bregenz production site