Favorite Designers

Plastic, Plastic Everywhere

by **Lauren Doyle** on December 14, 2010 at 03:16AM

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"I'm not a big jewelry wearer," says Barbara de Vries, the designer behind Plastic is Forever, the jewelry line made from beach plastic. But jewelry has turned out to be a good way to use the plastic, which is so plentiful on the outer beaches of The Bahamas that each time she travels there, de Vries returns with sacks of it.

The plastic is beautiful in an odd and almost disconcerting way. The jewelry made from it is so colorful and vibrant, that, at first glance, some pieces look as though they're made from coral, not plastic.

"A lot of people ask me if I dye it," de Vries says of the plastic. "That makes me realize how unaware they are of plastic. If you ask people what color a Tide bottle is, most people can't tell you."

In creating her collection, de Vries is trying to get people to notice just how much plastic is out there.

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Toy soldier necklace.

"Initially they gravitate toward it because they like the design, but the idea is that they get the story behind it and they tell the story - so when somebody says 'I like your shirt' they say 'oh, it's beach plastic' and then they get the idea that the plastic is out there and can be used."

Which is, de Vries says, the whole point - for plastic to be treated as a commodity, not a waste product.

de Vries has design in her blood. When she was a kid, she made clothing for her Barbie dolls, and then, when the clothing in the shops in her native Amsterdam didn't appeal to her, she made clothing for herself. After modeling for a few years, she moved to London to attend design school and then started her own line, which she describes as "Post-punk...everything was big and baggy."

After a few years she moved to New York and started working for Ann Taylor, then for Calvin Klein, as the Senior VP of design.

After that, "I stepped off the Merry Go Round," de Vries says of leaving the NYC fashion scene for marriage and motherhood and a home in Princeton. But, she never fully stepped off. Soon enough, de Vries started a children's clothing line, Baby Gordon.

Eventually, de Vries found herself in Miami, on an adventure chronicled on her blog, Barbie Does Miami. Then, on a trip to The Bahamas, she found beach plastic.

de Vries has an eye for pairing shapes and colors, so much so that, looking at the plastic that comprises her pieces, one wonders why *they* never thought to make jewelry out of debris. (Never mind the work that goes into finding and cutting and designing the jewelry. Never mind the keen eye it takes to put it all together in the designs that range from demure to funky.) Still, she would like to teach others how to do the same - to treat beach plastic as a commodity, something that can be upcycled, reused for a better, more aesthetically pleasing purpose than a plastic crate or bottle, or - *cringe* - litter.

During Art Basel, de Vries manned her "Barbie's Bottle Shack," at the Arts for a Better World exhibit in Wynwood. The structure was made from 2400 recycled plastic bottles that were strung together and contained a makeshift beach. On the beach were the t-shirts she's been commissioned to make for Barney's, along with piles of plastic in coordinating colors.

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Inside the bottle shack.

Also in the shack was her desk.

The idea was to bring the process of designing fashion from beach plastic to the viewer. "Process is becoming more and more important in art," de Vries explains. It was important for her that viewers see the process of her design and to make the connection that beach plastic, and plastic in general, is everywhere. And, for better or for worse, forever.

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