

OUR FUTURE NATURE PODCAST

SEASON 1

EPISODE 2: CANCEL CULTURE

SPEAKERS

Sean Lee Davies, Adam Raby

Sean Lee Davies 00:03

Welcome back to change makers. I'm your host, as always show me Davis. On change makers. I talk with some of the best minds and thought leaders in the field of sustainability, conservation, and social entrepreneurship. I aim to separate the real deal from the greenwash and document the transformative technologies that can make a difference to our lives and our world. Our guest today is entrepreneur and founder of Matsu resort wear. Adam Raby. Hope you enjoy. Hey, Adam.

Adam Raby 00:38

Hey, Sean, how's it going?

Sean Lee Davies 00:39

Work? We made it work. Yes, it finally got to call it going. Finally got to go. Well, thanks for joining. And thanks, everyone worries logging on. I know you're all busy. So as I was mentioning, we this is part of a series for changemakers where I interview social entrepreneurs, thought leaders who are making a difference by pivoting their businesses towards a more conscious approach, sustainable approach to business, from interviews around the world on this on these topics, which of course, even more important now the age of COVID, that we don't waste this opportunity to create a new normal, which is also a great opportunity. So I've been reading a book by Lily Cole. She is entitled Who Cares winds? And she currently? Yeah, she I don't know if you've read Adam but good reading. But she's pointing to this new paradigm where businesses have to show that they care about the environment or communities, otherwise, they're going to lose out. And actually, new statistics point to this new study that came out from good must grow.com saying that 29 to respond. percent of respondents said that they were purchased from a socially responsible brand. And 68% stated that they consider its ability to have a positive effect on society and the environment as one of the key factors in buying purchasing a brand. So anyway, that's enough of the preamble. Over to you Adam. You are the founder of Mizzou resort wear Ooh, yeah. With Yeah. And I also wear your trunks, do you call them trunks?

Adam Raby 02:24

i It depends where you come from around the world. I think some people call in some shorts. Trunks like bodies. I think like you go to Australia and everyone calls them bodies but bodies to you and me maybe like longer, kind of surfer style. Shorter. But yeah, trunks,

Sean Lee Davies 02:41

no bald crushers or Speedos?

Adam Raby 02:44

No, no, not yet. Maybe? I don't know. We'll see.

Sean Lee Davies 02:49

Okay, and just give us a little background about why you started it. And you inspired to start this brand?

Adam Raby 02:57

Yeah, no, I mean, I started it based upon a book that my dad wrote, which was called temples in Hong Kong. And I was quiet, I couldn't find a kind of an Asian inspired brand in Hong Kong, and even in Asia. So, all the brands that were being sold here, or being represented here, all kind of came from a Western background. And I thought to myself, well, Hong Kong and Asia have some of the most beautiful destinations in the world. Why is there no representation and obviously, like Hong Kong, which is obviously Hong Kong, fragrant harbor and Chinese, it kind of makes it quite a unique link. And, yeah, and then basically, set, set my goals to kind of do what I can to help ocean conservation. And I remember at the start of the business, I thought to myself, I'm going to do everything I can to throw in everything I do to help ocean conservation, but, you know, like, it's, there's some challenges along the way, which I'm sure we'll get into shortly.

Sean Lee Davies 04:01

Early, it's conservation pay, but as we're gonna find out, you know, being sustainably minded is paying off dividends. So, what made you because not all Mizzou wear is made from recycled plastic, but you've launched this new line of bamboo. I believe you're wearing one of the bamboo shirts now. And you've also launched a new line of trunks which are made out of recycled plastic. What made you pivot towards this more sustainable direction?

Adam Raby 04:26

Well, like I said at the start, it was always the goal was always to kind of have a brand that was going to be sustainable. When you're when you're starting off as an entrepreneur. It's actually really difficult to find. And seven years ago, eight years ago, even nine years ago, when I was first initially trying to develop the concept, I couldn't find any, any good factories that were able to produce, the quantities that I want, and the quality that I want with sustainable materials. It was a lot harder back then. I mean, it was available but the problem was they were they were demanding, you know, 20,000 pieces. And for a startup company, it's, it's a difficult challenge to sell 20,000 pieces in your

first go. So it was about building the foundation first. And then as years progress and technology came better, I was able to find fabrics that truly represented the designs and photography that were able to, as well as the quality that matched my standard for swimwear, basically. And that's how we mentioned before that recycled? Yeah, and that's how he developed the Mazu. You know, recycled plastic range, basically.

Sean Lee Davies 05:42

Okay, great. And just quickly going back, you mentioned something about like, interesting, which is not necessarily about sustainability. But there are many Asian brands sort of selling Asia or the aesthetic of Asia to a global community. Why is that? Why? Why do Asians always value something from the west or from elsewhere?

Adam Raby 06:03

I think I think at least from a fashion point of view, I think it's all about name brands. I mean, you look at other Asian brands that are doing well, I mean, the perfect sample in Hong Kong would be Shanghai Tang, you know, back in, back in the 90s, they were doing really well. And then don't know what quite happened since then. But that's a different story. But it's, I think it's the balance between East Meets West kind of thing, because I think Asian style is not always preferred by a lot of people. But then, you know, the little Western style is a mixture of different kind of fits and different colours. And I mean, you're wearing a normal colour today, and I'm wearing a mandarin collar. But you know, the little differences, some people prefer that some people don't, and it's trying to find the balance, my guess, being half Chinese and half English. It kind of allows me to try and find that balance. So it allows people to enjoy both aspects, which is. Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Sean Lee Davies 07:07

And with this new direction with sustainability, tell me like you talked a little bit about the challenges of creating that. Have you seen that this actually works in your favor from a business point of view? Is this affecting your bottom line? Was it affecting? Is it bringing in new sales and new revenue?

Adam Raby 07:24

Yes, I mean, we released a line that we worked with the Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society, and we donated 10% of our proceeds to and sales of those shorts to them. And it definitely helped. Because at the end of the day, like the pink dolphins is actually completely unique to Hong Kong, you can't find pink dolphins anywhere else in the world. Only place you can find pink dolphins is in Brazil, but they're freshwater dolphins, but something to do with the like the sea, the sand and, and kind of the pollution around the Hong Kong area has actually unfortunately, turned the dolphins pink in this region. And the numbers are diminishing very quickly. But the overall species in terms of what because they're actually called the Chinese white dolphin, which in the Pearl River, Delta there is 1000s of so they're not actually classified as a kind of extinct species or going to be because the larger species is actually still doing very well. But somehow they turned pink in Hong Kong. And it's

completely unique to this region, which is quiet, I think it's quite cool. And for a swimwear brand, I think dolphins is quite a good, good design to show off in terms of like, it's got western values, because dolphins are very intelligent and things like that. But the pinkness is unique to Hong Kong, which is that kind of angle that we're trying to go for. And yeah, and it helps like a lot. We've got a lot of good publicity about it. And we definitely, it's definitely sold out in some designs. And yeah, I'd like to do more. And the next step was the recycled plastic. So, I think there's still more to come, I think,

Sean Lee Davies 09:12

do you visit your future where basically all your products are made out of sustainable materials?

Adam Raby 09:18

Yeah, I think eventually, I mean, I definitely trying to, I mean, I look at it that is doing and I think I think what they're doing to make a goal to basically go fully sustainable by I think 24, which I think is pretty cool. I think it's to make that transition doesn't happen instantly has to take time, you and I know that there is so much plastic around in the world and trying to reduce it, you know, instantly it's quite hard. So, it takes steps. You know, we're starting to use kind of more sustainable bags as well, in terms of just so we're working with a company called the site distinctive action. And they kind of have these kinds of bags that you can put in hot water, and they completely disposable and have no environmentally, you know, they're good for the environment. And you can, yeah, it's pretty cool. So we can all take steps. And I think the best thing about plastic and the worst thing about plastic is that it's such a great material. And when you're, you know, shipping boxes away, you need something to protect it, especially when you're shipping to clients or things like that. So we try to use recycled boxes as well. So some of them that, you know, we use more than once and to at least have more than multiple different uses, which I think is the key when it comes to sustainability.

Sean Lee Davies 10:43

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, plastic, amazing material. But it's also that's what makes it such a dangerous material because of its disposability, as we know, of a million tones while probably more than that is thrown into the ocean every year, or the 10% of plastics that have ever been produced, have ever been recycled, you know, the statistics. But one interesting statistic here, which I want to sort of test you on is, you know, as much as 20, or 35% of all primary source microplastics in the marine environment, from synthetic clothing. Now, the fashion industry has a lot to answer. I think, you know, they were only now waking up to the devastation that the fashion industry has brought on the world is now being recognized as the one or first or second most polluting industry in the world in the fashion industry has to really change us. But this is this conversation is all about, but how do us specifically, you know, if we were washing your clothes, and that's causing some of those microplastics to go into the ocean? What do you say to that?

Adam Raby 11:47

It's, I mean, it's difficult because there's, there's a balance between cheapness and quality, right, not everyone can afford to buy the most expensive things, or not necessarily the most expensive, but the highest qualities. And usually the ones that are, you know, the highest qualities are the most expensive things and, you know, fast fashion, you know, the likes of, you know, the big names, you know, they're turning out things so quickly, to the point where people are maybe even using them one time, and then unfortunately, throwing them away. So I've always, I've always had that philosophy of like things have got to have more than one purpose, at least you have multiple purposes for them. Like we're developing a kind of a rash vest that potentially can be used as a jumper and a rash vest. So, it kind of eliminates to two things. And I think, I think like I said, I think that's the key when it comes to sustainability. I mean, like, you know, even if you do end up using a t shirt from a big name brand, you know, if it does wear out, maybe use it as a rag for your floor, or at least have some use that is more than what it should be. And no, you're right, the fashion world has a lot to answer for. And I think if we can all go over to more sustainable fabrics, the better it is. I just think it takes time. And I think you can see the progression happening now. Just takes a bit of time, unfortunately.

Sean Lee Davies 13:17

We just had a question posted by Richard chamber. Thanks, Richard. Just a bit. So I'm not always asking the questions. What's your biggest challenge? I mean, convincing people to choose more expensive, usually more expensive, sustainable products. Thank you, Richard.

Adam Raby 13:33

Yeah, I know, I know. Richard obviously comes from a brand that actually does a lot of good sustainable stuff. So, his company that he works for actually does a lot of good stuff. I think when it comes to trying to it's not it's not the right word to say but getting people to pay more for sustainable, I think it all comes down to branding. There is a reason why people wear certain clothes because of that connotation of what the brand represents. And if the brand represents kind of recycled things, you know, people Why do pipe people drive Priuses or why do people have Tesla's that there's certain brand values that people buy into and I think that's part of the reason why people pay more money for certain things, but at the same time, like now sustainable sustainability and fashion is a lot cheaper than it used to be. You know, I can order a lot less quantities with my factory then what I'd said before like 20,000 pieces and I'm sure Richard chambers his company they can do a lot smaller quantities now as well with sustainable fabrics, which opens the door for more brands and more people to be able to enter the market which is which is a good thing, I guess. More competitors love competition.

Sean Lee Davies 14:51

Absolutely. Well, what's the company the shameless keywords work?

Adam Raby 14:55

Yeah, he works for both company called tsunami Okay, and they do like customise sports apparel, which is, it's pretty cool. And actually, the Chamber's his brother is, has done a really good job kind of developing that brand. And now they're I think they're, if I might be wrong, but I think they're 100% sustainable as well now, which is quite good. And they do all sports, sports apparel. So there you go. Next time he's on the board.

Sean Lee Davies 15:27

Okay, just actually, quick, as a quick plug for another brand, there's a on this topic of microplastics, up to 700,000 microplastic particles can be released into the environment during every one laundry cycle. So, you know, whenever we put clothes, synthetic clothes into the washing machine, you know, obviously, we want to clean clothes, but we don't realise the damage that's causing down the line in the oceans. So there's a brand called Guppy, which is like a micro plastic bag, which you can put your synthetic clothes in to stop the microplastics from leaching into the water. And that's a great question for anyone out there. Katrina, who's on the line, she recommended that my girlfriend recommended that to me, so she Yeah, it was up to me today. So I highly recommend everyone's check out Guppy. Because I think that's a great little really easy way of stopping the microplastics for getting into the the ocean ecosystem.

Adam Raby 16:28

Yeah, I think everyone, I think the key is that everyone can do their part. I mean, it's impossible. And I admire that people I know some, you know, influences you follow that they completely cut plastic out of their lives. And, and I'm amazed that you know, you can that you can do I mean, I'd love I mean, I'm gonna challenge myself for a month to try and cut out single use plastics. Yeah, it's difficult. And

Sean Lee Davies 16:55

trying, and you're quite keen, actually, I can just let him ask the questions. What's on the horizon? And what excites you most about the available technology? It's a good question, because technology obviously, is going to have to play some part, a big part in trying to reduce this impact that we're having.

Adam Raby 17:14

Yeah, I think the biggest part of technology towards fashion is the way we recycle things. So I think, as I'm sure Richard knows, and people don't know the way kind of plastic gets recycled, they have to have to go through a lot of processes to kind of make sure it's clean, so that they can break the plastic down in order to turn it into fabrics, and different things like that. So I think that technology, potentially, you know, like bottle caps, and we don't all need labels on the bottles, for example, if I mean, if you're going to drink out of I mean that water companies can do more to make the whole recycling process better. And there are companies out there that don't have labels on them, that are like kind of embedded into the plastic, and it's better for recycling. And I think as the technology comes along, we're will be more efficient, definitely at at recycling quicker than that we can then

therefore, reduce the labour because the labour is the biggest problem when it comes to factories to reproduce plastic, because people think, oh, once you throw it in the bin, that's it, it's going to go to a factory, but no, you know, has to go to a factory partner, then they get turned down, go to another factory, then there's a long process that before it actually becomes an actual fabric. So technology will definitely enhance that a lot better, for sure.

Sean Lee Davies 18:39

Because oil is so cheap. Now, recycling plastic is become economically a burden. Whereas there were a lot of recycling factories in Hong Kong, but also around the world, which are now going out of business because it doesn't make sense from a financial point of view. So there has to be some sort of government incentivization. Yeah, to subsidise this activity. And I think it's basically a combination of customers wanting to pay a premium for these expensive procedures to happen for products that, you know, are being recycled or upcycled. And also government subsidising the people on the ground collecting it and then processing it because I don't think just customers alone can make it can make it work. I don't know. Does it? Does it work for you guys?

Adam Raby 19:25

Yeah, I mean, I think the breaking down of plastic in terms of reuse to be able to reuse it. I mean, I have a good friend that has a towels made top recycled plastic. And the broom is? Yeah, Rupert bird. Yeah, they make really good, great towels. Yeah, she's not I don't think she's here, but she'll like that. We gave her a little plug.

Sean Lee Davies 19:54

HK permit without wallets. Absolutely. Yeah, that's what we have to do. Without wallets by brands, which a more sustainable adhere at least to SDG goals such as number six and have a stronger CSR. So vote with your wallets and by Matsu

Adam Raby 20:14

Yeah, well, the recycled plastics that will slowly change over to recycled plastic shorts as soon as we can. Yeah.

Sean Lee Davies 20:25

Is like quick. Oh, sorry.

Adam Raby 20:28

No, no, go for it. No, go for it.

Sean Lee Davies 20:30

I'm gonna quickly switch gears here because I got into a little bit of a heated debate about this. I don't know if you've heard about the recent scandal with Oatley, I'm a big fan of only I drink early, and then all this, this cancel campaigns come out to to get rid of it because Blackstone is one of the

investors and they actually use canola oil and a lot of people now a lot of campaigners and activists are saying don't don't drink OD. which draws into question like, you know, how far do you go like, by using recycled plastic in your brand? Adam? are you actually doing any? Is it actually doing any good? Or is it more greenwash? Where do you draw the line?

Adam Raby 21:12

I, I know I mean, I know exactly what you mean, I think, at the end of the day, like, it's about building awareness, right? If I can, I mean, I'm not the perfect advocate of, you know, having to reduce plastic. And actually, the next month or so, I'm going to try and reduce as much plastic, I'm going to going to do a video blog every day, starting from today, and try and we talked about this, and I'm going to try and really go through Hong Kong life by only using well try to use as least single plastic as possible. So yeah, stay tuned, I'll keep a video blog of how that's going. It I think it's about building the awareness. I think like, my company is no, you know, no, Addy, that's or no kind of big brands. But, you know, we don't produce that, that big volumes. But at the end of the day, it's about building the awareness and kind of making people more conscious about it, obviously, people are doing it already with the straws. Five years ago, people were using plastic straws, and now their awareness and making people think about it and you know, five years on, I've not used a straw for over, you know, three, four months. And if I do use a straw, it's one of those kind of reusable ones or metal ones or, or things like that. So and then obviously, with the plastic bags, you know, all supermarkets now in Hong Kong, especially, and I know in other places around the world have reduced have completely cut plastic bags. And I think it's just about building the awareness if I can spread the message on. Even if it affects one or two people, there's one or two people could affect two or three people. And then eventually we can slowly make a change. Whether it makes effect I don't think I don't think I'm I mean, you have a lot more followers than me, but I don't think I don't think I have that much influence on people to tell him not to use plastic as much as possible.

Sean Lee Davies 23:11

Right. Well, everyone's got to do that. And Richard just came back. That's a production of recycled plastic or something is Brian are continuing the scrutinizing. And the development of the last two, three years has been incredibly promising. Thanks for it. So there is progress on that front. Lamb Jackie, last question. recycling plastic towels, reduce microplastics pollution, as a good question is your recycling, recycling plastic, and then you're potentially putting that microplastic back into the ocean when you wash it? And I don't think that's really been thought out yet. I think I think lamb Jackie or Jackie probably, you got to use a guppy bag to wash your attic towel in the Guppy bag that stops the microplastic from getting into the water, which then goes into the ocean. So hope that that helps, which is a good point actually brings me to this like, you know, I think part of the problem is you're an entrepreneur, it's hot enough to pay the bills, and especially in this economy. There's no like manual out that to say this is the Guide to Being a social or sustainable entrepreneur. I mean, you kind of have to go out, fudge your way through a walk, you know, fumble in the dark. And this is something that we've been trying to think about and project see changes that how do we create a community where there are successful entrepreneurs that are gonna actually say this is what you do

these the suppliers for this kind of products, etc, etc. Adam, I don't know if you had a any thoughts on that?

Adam Raby 24:39

Yeah, I mean, I think try. I mean, I spent years trying to find the right fabric. And, and I'm sure there are 1000s of people tried to find the same kind of recycled fabric as well. And it's it's probably Good thing that the community helps each other as well. I think it's very important for everyone to share. If anyone's looking for sustainable brands, I think it's also very important to share amongst the community as well. But yeah, like you said, I think everyone can do their part. It's all about those little details and all those little bits, because at the end of the day, all those little things will add up to one big thing. I've got a towel here. And actually, it's not like it's done by Rupert and bird. And like, I think the Yeah, it's very hard to see them. But I think I need to get myself a duffel bag.

Sean Lee Davies 25:34

Get a golf bag. Yeah, I had a great question. Um, my good friend, Sean Fitzpatrick, the other shown in the show and sandwich. He is He has asked that very question. And he brought this up the other day, he was like, He's hard that will read an article about the fact that recycled plastic bottles are so hot right now the brands actually buying new plastic bottles, melting them down to meet the demand for recycled plastic. So how can brands like yourself be aware or sure the provenance of the recycled plastic? Because that's a good point. If you're, if you're taking a plastic bottle and then melted down to make more Yes, I got I suppose it's kind of negates the whole point. Thank you.

Adam Raby 26:20

Yeah, I, I heard about I heard about this, I heard some factories in China are trying to, because they're trying to hop on the whole recycled plastic bandwagon. And there are certain certificates that are out there that you can ask us, ask the factory to send you and make sure you double check and do your due diligence and things like that. And, yeah, because when I started working with the likes of the W and the four seasons, I had to make sure, you know, because if they're doing audit, I had to make sure that you know, I won't get in trouble. And I, you know, went to go visit the factory and see the whole process as well as have the certificates to kind of show that is made from recycled because they get it from recycling plants. Now, where the recycling plant gets it from is it's hard to say because they get it from different sources from GM, because Chinese government a lot better than Hong Kong Government, when it comes to recycling programmes. It's hard to say if the recycle comes from the ocean, because they basically bring it all together. And then they kind of break it down and you know, use it. That's but they do get their sources from multiple different things that are recycling programmes from the government, you know, picking up from oceans and different things like that. So it's hard to say exactly, you know, I can't say, oh, I picked up this, this bottle from, you know, Thailand one, and then now it's in the factory, it doesn't work like that. Unfortunately, I would love to make a product that's like specifically trashed it picked up from a certain region, then then do something with that. But I don't know yet. Moment. But yeah.

Sean Lee Davies 27:59

Let's keep drawing and, you know, the more that we collaborate, the better. So we're coming to an end of our little changemakers interview. Were there any points that you wanted to add? Adam?

Adam Raby 28:12

No. I mean, like, I think the most important thing is that I think we all we all do our part. I mean, like, I'm, I'm in a fortunate position where I started my own company, almost eight years ago now. And the goal for me was to always kind of go down the sustainable route. Unfortunately, eight years ago, I couldn't go down that route, because I didn't find the right. I mean, I couldn't find the right amount to invest in and things like that. So money was definitely a factor in the early stages. And then also, the fabric wasn't so developed eight years ago, and now it is, and it's definitely the way forward. But like, I think, for me, it's, it's, it's all we can all do our part. I mean, when it comes to fashion, I think we have to use what we wear multiple times, not just one time use or kind of work for one season and, and I've been guilty, I'm when I was a struggling entrepreneur, still struggling entrepreneur, I went to Uniqlo I bought some T shirts for cheap price, you know, like that's because, you know, sometimes that's what, that's what you have to do to survive. But I think the key is to have more than one use. That's, that's the most important thing. I think, if no one can just use things more than once, especially for what they intend for then at least we can reduce things by half, I think, at least

Sean Lee Davies 29:36

that's an achievable, longevity, reuse it, and, you know, buy from sustainable brands. So yeah, thank you, Adam. That's helpful. Thank you, Richard for the good questions. Check out tsunami boats, everyone. They seem to be a brand on the pulse. Of course, make Kalamazoo resort where I either all the time, should we will also be organising things we're going to do a collaborative battle paddleboard beach cleanup soon. So yes, keep curious. Thanks for joining Adam. Thank you all for tuning in. I hope you enjoyed the conversation as much as I did and hope you learned something. And don't forget to check out Guppy bags when you wash your laundry because that could help stop the microplastics will seep into the water. Thank you everyone for watching. Thank you, Shauna, thank you, Katrina. Bye for now. Thanks, guys. If you like our show and want to support our work, we have a patron link on my website sl.studio.com/podcast changemakers. We'll be back next week. See you then.