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MANTA BY RICHARD FREDRICK

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Richard Fredrick is accessorizing consumers with cruelty-free peace of mind. He is the founder of MANTA, an animal-friendly designer belt company. "This is me in a nutshell," says Fredrick, pointing to a vegan belt buckle with a picture of cattle (taken from the USDA Web site). "It's ironic, sarcastic and vegan," he says with a smile.

Fredrick, a 20-year vegetarian, has found the vegan retail market to be more welcoming in recent years. "In the early '90s, it was difficult to find quality faux animal products," he says. This motivated him to design and provide a high-quality, fashion-forward vegan product to the fashion industry. MANTA uses animal-free materials such as Ultrasuede and marine-strength Naugahyde. "Ultrasuede is a high-quality material and is actually more expensive than leather," says Fredrick. The belts are embellished with genuine semi-precious stones, Swarovski Austrian Crystal and various metals. All manufacturing takes place onsite, and custom belts are also available.

MANTA, named after Fredrick's favorite animal and good luck symbol, distributes to numerous San Diego locations such as Bella Mema, Mesh, Kate Ross, SilkandHoney.com, InfectiousThreads.com and Sugar. MANTA also distributes its Biker Bling collection, consisting of animal-friendly, studded belts in a biker style, to Harley-Davidson stores. Upcoming items include the Retro collection, inspired by the late '50s era and Bossa Nova jazz music, as well as the Punk collection, reminiscent of the late '70s British punk era.

MANTA continues to produce belts that last long and look good, while respecting animal rights. "Every time someone buys our belts, it's nice to know that they're not buying ones made from animals," says Fredrick.

MISSION PLAYGROUND

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Mark McMahon and Patrick Shami are on a mission to preserve the earth's playground. They have combined their business and retail knowledge with their appreciation for nature to create Mission Playground, an eco-conscious outdoor clothing and accessory company. "We offer more than a clothing company," says Shami. "It's an extension of identity and a chance to create awareness."

Unlike most outdoor apparel brands, Mission Playground incorporates globally minded art and design into its products. The company carries men's, women's and children's lines with graphics and messages intended to generate environmental awareness. All art and design is created onsite. "We want to create consciousness because when we think, we are aware, and when we are aware, we make good decisions," says McMahon.

Mission Playground utilizes eco-friendly materials such as 100 percent organic cotton, recycled cotton and polyester, bamboo charcoal, merino wool, lyocell and recycled polar fleece. In addition, the company is thorough in researching the raw materials and manufacturing processes to ensure compliance with its mission to be green. "We have to represent something that we are confident is environmentally friendly," explains Shami.

Though this progressive brand appeals to a younger attitude, Mission Playground is not a surf/skate company; instead, it offers apparel for a wide range of activities. "We don't want to limit ourselves to creating for one specific activity," says McMahon. "We want people to enjoy whatever they like doing on the 'playground' while preserving the environment."

Products can be purchased online and at local San Diego stores such as REI, Whole Foods and Adventure 16. One percent of all sales are donated to non-profit organizations that share the same passion for environmental awareness.