

# ESPIRE CLOTHING

Espire Clothing is a small, family-run business in Bright, Victoria. Going against the global trend, Espire designs and makes its own brand clothing on site at its retail store. Sustainability is at the core of the Espire brand from sourcing fabrics to managing waste. Very little packaging comes into the store, and everything that does is reused or recycled in creative ways. Soft plastic wrap is cut down to make storage bags, product sales are wrapped in vintage clothing patterns or re-purposed shopping bags, and postage bags are home compostable.

## About the company

The Espire Clothing store was established three years ago in Bright by Balin Foley, after developing his business model through market stalls and pop-up shops. T-shirts, dresses, hoodies and shirts are made on the premises. One of the unique services provided by Espire is the ability to tailor clothes to suit each customer's needs and tastes. Finding the right fit for people, often with only small adjustments, provides an important point of difference for customers.

## Reduce, reuse, recycle

Espire's business model is based on a strong commitment to 'buy local' to ensure that every part of the supply chain is environmentally and socially sustainable. Wherever possible fabrics and products are purchased within Australia (preferably Victoria) to reduce transport distances, and to ensure that the company knows where and how products are made. For example, some of the fabrics, socks and shoes are manufactured in Melbourne while wool for the hand knitted beanies is sourced from Bendigo Woollen Mills.

Buying local also translates into less packaging waste: one roll of fabric makes 30 hoodies, saving around 150 items of packaging. If the same number of hoodies was imported from China each garment would use an average of 5 plastic bags to get into store.



## Packaging

There is minimal incoming packaging and all of it is reused or recycled:

- clear plastic wrap around fabric rolls is cut down to make storage bags for fabric scraps, and any excess recycled
- cardboard boxes from sock deliveries are reused back-of-house to store fabric pieces and any excess recycled
- cardboard from fabric rolls are cut in half to make dividers for storage boxes
- suppliers are encouraged to eliminate or take-back packaging
- second hand zip-up plastic bags are collected from an Op shop to store customer orders prior to collection

Product sales are wrapped in vintage clothing patterns and placed in a second hand paper retail bag. A sticker is placed on the bag with the Espire logo and a simple message, such as 'We want your old bags (to use them again)' or 'We upcycle everything' (many of the used bags are brought into the store by customers). The company even uses strips of cotton fabric to bundle items instead of rubber bands, while online and made-to-order sales are posted to customers in plastic satchels made from a certified home compostable plastic.

## Other upcycling initiatives

Espire's commitment to minimal waste extends even further, with vintage fabrics and leftover pieces used in the making process to line hoodies and for shirt pockets. Not only does this help the environment, but it helps make each item unique.

Everything for the store fitout is either second hand or upcycled, including the old plate glass window repurposed as a display table, the counter rescued from a Bendigo Bank, an old piano used to display socks and the hoodie rack made from an old fence. An expensive sewing machine was rescued from a local skip bin before it was sent to landfill.

## Engaging customers

Espire tries to engage customers in its sustainability program. A large poster in the window calls out 'For the planet. We strive to become a sustainable brand. Here's the steps we are taking...' Other posters around the store describe their business model, waste reduction, recycling and upcycling initiatives.



## Next steps

Balin and his team continue to look for opportunities to reduce or upcycle waste materials. Opportunities currently being explored include use of cotton scraps for pillow stuffing and making shopping bags from leftover fabrics. Their approach is "If we can't find a use for something, we store it until we can". Espire shows how much can be achieved by a small business with a proactive and creative approach to sustainability.

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