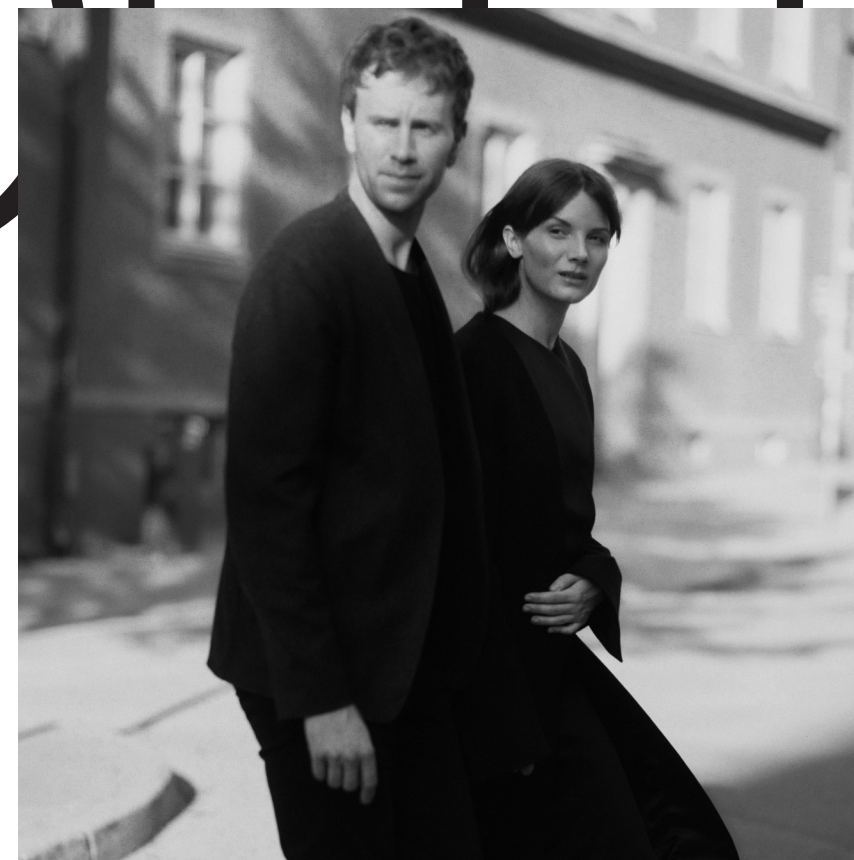




# BITE

WORDS  
CAROLINA BENJUMEA



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BITE STUDIOS

AS FASHION AND LUXURY BRANDS CONTINUE TO EXPLORE EFFORTS TOWARD A MORE SUSTAINABLE AND ETHICAL PRODUCTION, SOME KEY PLAYERS STEP UP TO PROVE THAT A DIFFERENT INDUSTRY IS POSSIBLE. IN THIS CONTEXT, VERONIKA AND WILLIAM SPARE NO EFFORT IN PUTTING BITE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THIS CHANGE.



CAROLINA Tell us about your background. When did you decide to create your own clothing label, and at what point did you decide that sustainability would be an important part of the brand?

WILLIAM We started in 2016 and launched in 2019 and we did a lot of research in the beginning. I would say it's very personal for us. I grew up in the northern part of Sweden, in a town called Umeå. It's 12 hours by train from Gothenburg. It's dark during the winter, with the sun up for only three to four hours a day, and it snows for six months a year. The summer is beautiful, with the sun never going down. My mom grew up in a tiny place with only two houses. If you take a train for 12 hours to Umeå, then drive for three hours and go off-road for 30 minutes, you reach a small place called Lundnäs. It has only two houses. She had to ski for two hours to get to the grocery store. Everyone in my family has always lived there and works in the forest. My mom had an urge to read and became a professor and an author. This is deeply rooted in why we exist, emphasizing closeness and respect to nature. This is why BITE exists and why we focus on organics, using organic wools, silks, and cottons. Our last collection contains only 1% synthetics. Phasing out synthetics and pioneering sustainability is very important to us. Sixty percent of all garments today are made of wool and take around 200 years to break down. For us, this is the most beautiful way to operate. So, BITE is a vision-driven brand. You [Veronika] and I met on a staircase.

VERONIKA You had been traveling.

WL Yes, I was traveling, and the idea came up in New Zealand. I was hiking in Milford Sound, an incredibly lovely place. I was silent for a month, and then the idea emerged. Both of us have a business background but a huge interest in arts and fashion. I was reading a lot about the problems in the industry and thought there must be a way to combine a beautiful, strong design agenda driven by art with a respectful way of producing. So we spent the first years researching extensively.

Now we don't produce in India, but we went there early on to learn about the manufacturing side. We learned a lot and met with many pioneers. Currently, we produce everything in Portugal and Italy, with many fabrics sourced from Italy as well. That's the background and reason why we exist. BITE is a very vision-based brand. It's very difficult to achieve this, but it's the only way we can operate. This vision influences every decision we make in the company and reflects in the design. We start a lot from our material library and then design in a more iterative process, beginning with the materials.

CB Coming from Sweden, a country known for its stunning natural landscapes, how do you stay true to your roots while creating designs with global appeal?

WL I think we found a niche. Sixty percent of our sales are in the US. The UK, France, South Korea, and Japan are also big markets for us. Scandinavia is not our main market. We operate in a design luxury segment, offering what I would call feminine minimalism. Our collection has femininity, ease, and elegance, rooted in a minimalistic approach but with a more artistic view.

Our inspiration is hyper-local, deeply rooted in the inner self, and also experimental, driven by our longing to be in New York, Paris, and the art scene. Our collections reflect this inward and outward focus. They are not Scandinavian per se—they are minimal and quite androgynous, yet also artistic, expressive, and global. We just happened to be born and raised in Sweden.

CB Building a conscious and ethical brand often comes with







higher costs, which can make it challenging for a young brand to establish itself. Was it difficult to break into the market with your business model, and how was the public’s response in the beginning?

vk In the beginning, we needed good funding for the brand. We didn’t come from money or anything like that, so we were lucky enough to attract investors who shared our beliefs in sustainability. This support helped us enter the market, even though we had to spend the first three years working hard before getting there. It’s been a tough journey to enter the market, to say the least.

wl We launched with Net-A-Porter, who featured us as the vanguard. They choose two brands a year that they believe in and put a lot of marketing behind them, which was great for us. We got a lot of PR in the beginning, which was really important. We are positioned within the luxury field, alongside brands like Khaite, The Row, and Jil Sander, but at a more democratic price point. Our customers get a lot of value for the price because of our amazing, beautiful organic qualities and high design perspective across the full collection.

BITE is seen as a very price-worthy option within the luxury space, and we enjoy operating in this field. This positioning also appeals to a larger segment. We aim to set trends and make environmental design desirable, leading by example in the luxury market.

cb With recent issues in luxury manufacturing, it’s crucial that your partners uphold the same high standards. You work with manufacturers across Europe, including in Portugal, Italy, and Sweden. How do you ensure they align with your ethical and social values?

vk First of all, we are still small, so we work with a handful of suppliers with whom we have very close relationships. We visit them quite often. Apart from that, as a small brand, we rely on third-party audits and certifications to ensure they meet our ethical and social standards.

So, we always look for partners who can be transparent and have certain certifications or where we can conduct audits. We evaluate each new supplier from that aspect. The same applies to our materials, as we only buy certified materials with trade certificates, etc. This is hugely important for us; we couldn’t operate any other way. We have nine employees, so it’s great that these global organic standards are available for everyone to use.

cb Art, ecology, and technology are at the heart of your designs.

How does the intersection of these concepts influence the brand’s style?

wl Art and environmental concerns are our core focus, and then we use technology to build an interesting business model around that. Currently, we’re working on digitizing each product so that every item comes to life. You will be able to scan a button on a garment and enter a world showing how the garment was produced. Additionally, as a customer, you’ll have a one-click option to resell it on your preferred second-hand market. We also hope to include a repair option. Using technology helps us create a more circular business model, aligning with our vision.

vk We believe that building a brand with an environmental focus requires looking both backward and forward. You need to understand and utilize ancient techniques and work closely with material suppliers who have been in business for a hundred years or more. This helps in understanding and exchanging fibers. At the same time, you must look forward to new technologies to build innovative business models and adapt to modern society.

wl I think the duality of looking both backward and forward is very important. Sometimes, there’s a tendency to focus solely on new technologies, but for us, everything must align with our overall vision.

cb Since founding BITE, do you feel the brand and its style have evolved, or have you maintained a consistent direction throughout?

wl It has definitely evolved in the last four or five seasons into a more expressive approach. We certainly have our DNA in everything we do.

vk We started with minimalism and evolved from there, developing a desire for more playful and expressive design. Much of this evolution is driven by our personal journeys and experiences. We work from what we have, building our collection as a library and evolving from that. As a result, it has become a bit more feminine and expressive.

wl It’s become a bit more playful and less serious. We strive to maintain high integrity in everything we do while also keeping a bit of distance, which I find very interesting.

cb Who do you envision when designing? How would you describe the BITE person?

wl She’s very much a global leader. We want to dress those female leaders, who have high integrity.

vk Yes, exactly. We have different personas in mind, but one of them is a more mature woman who knows her style and



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appreciates quality. She navigates various aspects of work and family life. What we want is for our clothes to serve a purpose in how we feel when wearing them. We often wear the clothes ourselves and want them to provide a sense of well-being. By wearing organic materials close to your skin, you feel good because they breathe well and help regulate your temperature, and layering with organics makes you feel very good. Our design approach is about effortless chic—clothes that are easy to wear and make you feel confident and comfortable when you enter a room.

CB BITE is an acronym for 'By Independent Thinkers for Environmental Progress'. Can you explain the concept of independent thinkers and why it is important for the brand?

WK I think we attract a lot of independent thinkers. We try to be ourselves as much as possible and are drawn to people who share that mindset. There is a strong creative force in BITE, with a thoughtful approach and an appreciation for poetry, literature, art, and the food scene. We are naturally drawn to people with similar interests, and I think that's part of why you enjoy BITE. It's also a bit interdependent; we rely on each other.

CB Yes, absolutely. To me, it's about people who aren't afraid to forge their own path. In the fashion industry, being an ethical and sustainable brand often goes against the established norms. I find the concept of independent thinkers really interesting in that context.

WK We really believe that the whole industry will move in this direction in a few years; it's just a matter of time. I think we are in the middle of something right now, evident in the world's current elections and the ongoing wars. It's a battle between the old world and the new world. Eventually, the new world will win—it's just a matter of time. Producing high amounts of synthetics, for example, won't be the norm in a few years. This shift will be the standard going forward.

CB As a brand committed to the highest standards of sustainability and ethics, do you believe the fashion industry is doing enough to become more sustainable and ethical?

WK No... But we need to answer that in a good way (laughs).

VK We believe that every brand should use what's available rather than relying on conventional methods. There are many techniques out there that can be utilized, and while there is a lot of focus on new technology and materials, doing the best with what we have right now is our standpoint. We feel that some brands could do more.

WK The entire industry needs to address this issue. It's a matter of looking at the facts and understanding the impact the industry

has. I believe that the collective creative force in the industry needs to be placed in an environment where we can solve this problem together.

VK We also started by looking at the huge impact. When we began BITE, we researched extensively and found that 70% of emissions come from upstream production. We believe that this should be the primary focus. Then there's transportation, and end-of-use, which are also important, but upstream production should be the priority.

CB You have a strict ban on virgin synthetics. I recently read that almost 50% of fast fashion brands use virgin synthetics. What are your thoughts on the current state of fashion and what do you hope to see change sooner than later?

WK I think many customers aren't aware of this. If they knew that they're wearing materials derived from oil next to their skin—often in amounts like 50-60%—no one would want that. Everyone would likely prefer beautiful organic materials. The quality of organic fabrics is unmatched compared to synthetics. Price is a factor, but for a design-conscious, contemporary, and luxury consumer, once you experience and wear organic materials, you won't want to go back. Wearing beautiful organic silk, for example, feels incredibly good. From both a quality and luxury perspective, organic materials are superior. Despite being cheaper to produce synthetics, organic materials should be the default choice for designer brands.

VK We know it's challenging, and there are exceptions. We spend a lot of time on these processes and need to be uncompromising in our strategy because there are many difficult decisions to make daily. It's not that we say it's easy, but we believe there is still more to be done. We want to be the alternative that demonstrates it's possible to create a full-range collection with really high quality.

WK We never want to point fingers; that's very important. BITE is meant to be solution-driven and positive, always leading with beauty. It's crucial to frame these conversations around beauty because the entire industry is driven by it. Environmental thinking should evolve in harmony with beauty, making it the most beautiful way to produce. In that sense, it's the ultimate way of producing.

CB Seeing brands adopt a circular buy-back program is inspiring and shows that a different approach to the industry is possible. What inspired you to incorporate this program into BITE?

WK It's also about connecting the business model with everything we do, which puts pressure on us to design very high-quality products. This approach helps us build a relationship with customers after selling a product, rather than ending it







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## WE BELIEVE THAT BUILDING A BRAND WITH AN ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS REQUIRES LOOKING BOTH BACKWARD AND FORWARD.

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there. Making this process more digital will also help us scale significantly moving forward. If I have the numbers right, about 20% of the luxury industry is currently in the second-hand market, and it's expected to grow by 2025. This is a large portion of the industry and very encouraging, as many brands are actively working on this.

<sup>CB</sup> How do you express the same sustainability and ethical approach within the company? What is most important when building your teams?

<sup>VK</sup> We want our team to be close-knit and collaborative, with a flat hierarchy. Being based in Stockholm, Sweden, we believe that working closely together is essential to creating exceptional clothes that can compete with major players in Paris. It's important for us to have a driven environment where everyone shares our environmental vision. When everyone works towards the same purpose, it becomes quite fulfilling. We all believe in the importance of BITE's presence in the global market, which makes the work enjoyable.

<sup>CB</sup> Through the journey of building this brand together, what have you learned about the fashion industry and about yourselves?

<sup>VK</sup> We knew very little about the industry when we started, apart from being consumers and having an interest in fashion. We didn't understand the mechanics behind it at all. We've learned a lot since then, both about the industry and about ourselves.

<sup>WL</sup> We live together as well, so you and I have learned a lot about ourselves and our strengths. It's also been exceptionally hard work—we've worked day and night, constantly. Those are the two main focuses in our lives: our personal growth and the immense dedication required.

<sup>VK</sup> You need to stand your ground and remain committed to what you believe in, taking a long-term approach. It's important to have partners who share that long-term vision. We believe that time is crucial and that persistent effort is key.

<sup>CB</sup> What changes or improvements would you like to see in the future in the practices used within the fashion industry?

<sup>WL</sup> I think consumers are increasingly expecting to pay for actual quality, not just for the brand. Their mindset is shifting, and they will demand more value for their money, which is a positive development. We need to change how we approach material production in the industry, phasing out oil-based materials as quickly as possible.

We also need to consider overall consumption and what we're contributing to the world. We have a limited time on this earth, so it's important to think about the kind of companies we want to create and their purpose. What is the vision, and why does this company need to exist? I believe there will be significant changes in this regard.

<sup>VK</sup> We want fashion to be a positive force that brings people together for a brighter future. We believe there are solutions and ways to move forward despite the challenges. It would be wonderful if fashion could reflect that and take on that role.

<sup>WL</sup> Since fashion is so connected to art, beauty, identity, and desire, it has great potential to drive change. Right now, it's not in the driver's seat, but it has a huge potential to shape people's mindsets, which is an incredible opportunity for the industry.

<sup>CB</sup> With the experience you have garnered over the years, what do you think is the future of the brand, and what are your goals?

<sup>WL</sup> Our goal is to be an example that proves this is possible and to accelerate change by being a positive model. We aim to grow large enough to make that change happen.

<sup>VK</sup> We also want to connect with people who share our values. We believe there are many, both women and men, who resonate with our mentality. We want to reach out to these customers even more and *truly be a positive change-maker*.