

GREEN GODDESS

The diary of a reluctant eco-warrior

As someone who has spent her entire adult life ignoring the benefits of recycling, the plight of Britain's hedgerows and the rights of cyclists, Christa D'Souza was the perfect candidate to accept Vogue's challenge: to spend two weeks living the very greenest good life. Photograph by Bela Borsodi

Monday 9.30am

Uh-oh, here we go. Time to accept *Vogue's* challenge to go eco for a fortnight. Because this is only the first day, I haven't really done very much to prepare besides putting on my Birkenstocks. But that doesn't matter, because in a few minutes I've got someone called Trewin Restorick, the director of an environmental organisation called Global Action Plan, coming round to show me the eco-ropes. Sure enough, right on time here he is, looking somehow just as I expected someone called Trewin would, in his flannel shirt and sensible shoes, carrying a questionnaire under one arm. "Right then," he says over a glass of water (tap, that is, not mineral – think of the CO₂ emissions produced in order to transport it from source and the chemicals used to bottle it!). "Shall we start from the bottom and slowly work upwards?"

When I told friends about this latest stunt, most of them recoiled in boredom. I must say, I myself thought twice before accepting the assignment. Having been brought up in Islington, the daughter of a rampant human-rights activist, I've suffered more than my fair share over the years of people living in yurts, recycling their own sewage, knitting their own yoghurt and so on. The result of being brought up in such an eco-friendly, socially conscientious environment, sitting on hemp cushions made by Afghan refugees, supporting the disgusting

local grocer's shop because its Turkish owner was persecuted back home and so forth, is that I've spent most of my adult life rejecting it all.

Before I take too much of the blame, though, I must point out that Nick, the father of my children, is just as bad. Although he is on a permanent crusade to lower our exorbitant electricity bill (he once even typed a letter to me and the nanny saying that if we didn't start getting our act together on the light-turning-off front, he was going to stop paying it), the number of gadgets he keeps on standby round the house could probably power the whole of Basingstoke if he turned them all off at source. One such gadget is a large red vinyl massage chair, which he insists on putting right in the middle of the living room. Its one eco-advantage, I suppose, is that as long as it is there, I'll not waste one tiny iota of energy on having people over...

Oh dear. If Trewin only *knew* how little I cared about cyclists' rights or the maintenance of hedgerows. How much water I boil to get the perfect cup of tea or how often I set the washing machine off with just the one T-shirt because I fancy wearing it that evening.

Monday 11am

Trewin, bless him, has finally gone on his way and I am left with a notebook fairly bulging with "Things To Do". There's the washing line and pegs I've got to buy (driers are not very

eco at all, says Trewin, especially if you've got a garden); there's the vegetable and fruit box scheme I've got to join and the compost heap I've got to start. There's the Oyster Card I must buy, the 100 per cent renewable energy supply company and the Co-operative Bank I must call, the man I have to contact to look at the reverse osmosis tap (that third, skinny tap that magics away all that fluoride and other chemicals put into our reservoirs so our drinking water doesn't taste too much like reconstituted urine) on the kitchen sink... Oh God, and then there's the nappy issue to deal with. There is one tiny ray of light. Didn't I hear somewhere that disposable ones aren't nearly as bad as everybody makes them out to be, that they actually absorb some of the more toxic gasses that landfill sites give off? Or is that something I read on *The Onion*?

The world, I've figured out, can be divided into two types of people: those who believe that every little bit counts, and those who don't. Trewin, my mum, and the nanny (who drives me mad the way she never throws out loo rolls in case they come in useful for future art projects) all believe that it does and I just... don't. It's the reason why I've never voted and am terrible at turning lights out. It's probably the reason I've never bought a lottery ticket either. Having children, perversely, has made me even less of a socially engaged person than I was to start with. Whenever anything >



remotely to do with famine, torture or the future of the environment comes up on the news, I'll switch it off or leave the room.

And yet... having listened to at least some of what Trewin was saying – that due to global warming one million species could be extinct by 2050, and that by 2100 the Maldives will have completely disappeared – can I really go back to setting the dishwasher off with just the one cup and saucer? Can I really revert to lobbing wine bottles into black bags or dirty nappies into the orange ones that the council provide for recycling? Especially now that I know there's a real live human sitting there at the recycling plant, fishing them all out?

Monday 6pm

My big worry, of course, is the clothes issue: how to be green and glamorous at the same time. It's all very well recycling my rubbish and remembering to turn my computer off at night, but if I'm doing it while wearing something that involved an animal having an electrode shoved up its bum or a farmer committing suicide with the pesticide that has ruined the earth in which he used to grow his crops, then what's the point? Musing on this dilemma, I go to a cocktail party given by those lovely girls at The Cross. I'm half hoping that this is where I might get my eco-look together in one fell swoop – the clothes they sell certainly look the part – but no such luck. Apart from Dosa – whose LA owner, Christina Kim, has been working with 100 per cent organic cotton for 12 years – tragically, there's nothing here that will really do for the experiment. As my favourite salesgirl Halima tells me over a strawberry daiquiri (herself a bit of an eco-warrior, being the daughter of the man who founded Infinity Foods in Brighton), there are lots of great designers out there who love the idea of fair-trade manufacturing and 100 per cent organic cotton, but can't afford to take the financial risk. "It's a shame," she says gesturing to her frightfully eco-looking Miss Italy skirt and Paul & Joe top, "because there are thousands of us who'd happily pay the premium. As yet, 'organic' in the clothes industry just isn't enough of a sexy proposition."

Tuesday 10.30am

I am now on my way down to the East End, where the offices of People Tree, the fair-trade and eco-friendly clothing label favoured by the likes of Sienna Miller, Chris Martin and Minnie Driver, are located. OK, the label doesn't sell at The Cross, but it does sell at Selfridges and, according to an extremely nice girl I talked to earlier this morning at Oxfam, doesn't look "hempy" at all. Somehow I have my doubts that I'll find anything when I walk

into the open-plan office. It's something about the posters of happy Indian workers everywhere and the look of bafflement I get from the boy who buzzes me in when I ask him if there's a microwave in which I could quickly zap the rest of my takeaway coffee. I do not dare say as much, of course, when I am introduced to the company's attractive, dauntingly switched-on owner, Safia Minney. In town for the week from Tokyo, where she lives with her husband and two young children and runs People Tree's flagship office, Minney looks fab in her own rather whimsical designs, but then who wouldn't if they were size two and had a tan? The lady knows her stuff inside-out and while we talk about her involvement in the cause, about Global Village, the NGO forum she set up for those wanting to speak out for greater justice in world trade – "it's so possible for us all to engage in the issue and it makes me so angry the fashion industry can't do it!" – I suddenly decide that maybe, just maybe, there might be something here I could wear after all.

As I leave, Minney hands me a video of People Tree's organic cotton production in India and a leaflet on the difference between ethical and fair-trade clothing. (Just so you know, ethical merely means giving the workers a fair wage. Fair trade, which involves much more of a commitment, means letting the workers produce in their own villages, letting them use their own skills and resources, and investing in the community.) She then asks me what other designers I'm considering mentioning in the piece. Meekly I tell her I thought I might give Stella McCartney's new shop on Bruton Street a try. "Stella McCartney?" says Minney, "Sorry, but what's Stella McCartney got to do with the cause other than being a vegan?"

Tuesday 1pm

Gosh, Stella's things are lovely. I would get a pair of her vegan stilettos, but I'm worried that, being made of plastic, they might make my feet smell. Besides, isn't the manufacture of plastic absolutely awful for the environment? On the other hand, if committed eco-sorts like Trudie Styler and Sienna can shop here without guilt, then surely I can too? While waiting to pay for my amazing, life-changing new jacket, I suddenly notice that the fairytale forest tableau on the wall is not painted, but inlaid with exquisitely crafted marquetry. From nowhere, a miniature Minney suddenly perches herself on my shoulder and wonders if any exotic trees had to be cut down to make it.

Tuesday 3.30pm

Hooray, my new eco-friendly car has just been delivered! Called a Toyota Prius and billed "the cleanest car in the world", it runs partly on petrol, partly on its electric engine (at only 14 miles per hour) but gets a massive 60 miles to the gallon. Having never come across a hybrid car before, I'd half expected it to look like one of those pale-blue three-wheelers disabled people drive or a milk float, or a combination thereof. In fact, it is one of the sleekest, sportiest little things I've ever set eyes on, far far more glamorous than the tired old banger the nanny and I currently share.



No wonder Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Hanks, Cameron Diaz, and (so the man who delivered it assured me) Tony Blair are all such fans. No wonder it costs £18,345 – more of which later. All day, I think up more and more different excuses to drive it. Down to the paper shop at the end of the road to get a *Guardian*, up the other end of the road to get some vinegar for washing the windows. For the first time in months, I magnanimously offer to do the school run, and because I'm early, end up circling round and round Battersea Park. That evening, I figure out I've done more driving in a day than I usually do in a week. Ah well.

Wednesday 5.30am

I am awoken by the sound of the doorbell. Who

the hell can it be? Oh yes. I'd forgotten. This is the day my fruit and veg delivery arrives from Farmaround, the Yorkshire-based box scheme Trewin recommended I join. The scheme—a process whereby a random selection of locally produced fruit and veg are dumped on your doorstep, and really the only way to get organic produce before the supermarkets and all those fancy farm shops muscled in – appears to be back in fashion once again. Not

from dairy to soya (a decision based on some factoid I read which claimed that dairy cattle are bred to produce so much milk that their bones crumble after a year or two. According to a report I saw in yesterday's paper, eating too much soya makes people aggressive, which would account for why I was so extra mean this morning to the Neal Street chugger (charity work/mugger) wanting a few seconds of my time, and why I snapped at the girl

it, says my children are starving, could someone, anyone, go and get them some food? Despite having two articles to write in as many days, I head off to Fresh & Wild in Notting Hill. As usual, it is teeming with Marni-clad SUV-driving hippy-chicks that, like me, couldn't really give a toss about reducing their ecological footprints on the environment. Perhaps because I'm not used to the weekly shop, I go overboard, lobbing anything into my trolley as long as it's got the organic label on it. My bill comes to a very non-eco £200, double what the nanny usually spends.

Thursday 11.15am

Oh, but who cares about organic now? Especially now you can get it at Iceland. Such is my mindset, anyway, as I browse through all the bio-dynamic produce at Here, the health-food store in the Chelsea Farmers' Market. The bio-dynamic movement, as Troy, the shop's handsome American founder tells me, predates the organic movement by about 20 years, and involves harvesting crops, slaughtering livestock and so forth according to the cosmic rhythms of the earth. For the life of me I cannot see how the waxing and waning of the moon can affect the taste of food, but buoyed by Troy's good looks and fabulous skin, I end up buying at least

£60 worth of bio-dynamic Tamworth pork sausages, lamb noisettes, fillet steak and carrots, all bearing the Bio Dynamic Demeter label. It will join the £150 worth of produce I've ordered from Swaddles, an organic free-range farm shop in Somerset that we've been using for a year or so. I do hope that bio-dynamically raised animals get a little anaesthetic and a stroke before they are slaughtered because for that price, they really ought to.

On the way home I pop into Traid, an ethical second-hand clothes shop on Westbourne Park Road... and pop straight out. Handbags made from recycled orange-juice cartons and skirts made from recycled Puma trainers look marvellously kooky on people like Summer Phoenix and those cool girls from *Cheap Date* magazine, but on a mother aged 44 such as myself they just look clinically insane.

Saturday 3.15pm

It's the end of half term and the nanny, the children and I are all driving back from our little cottage in Wiltshire – in separate cars because I don't want my precious Prius to get mucked up by sweet papers and Beanos and pretzel crumbs... Slowly, slowly, I think I'm getting the hang of things. Indeed, as I drive past Stonehenge, eating an organic carrot, >

Going green: *left*, Christa visits Swaddles Farm to buy organic and free-range food for her family; *below*, in the Stella McCartney shop in her "life-changing jacket" and a pair of vegan McCartney shoes; *right*, the wonderfully idyllic-looking Swaddles Farm in Somerset



behind the counter at Costa for taking so long to make my fair-trade Americano. Time, perhaps, to go on a "people retreat" – a new American fad that involves paying hundreds of dollars to live on the streets for a week and see what it's like to be a bum. That, or start up my compost heap.

Wednesday 9.30am

Right, I've put all the fruit and veg scrapings that Nick used for his juicing this morning in a little plastic bag, ready to transfer into the sexy Brabantia twin-bin (one side for recycling) I plan to buy from Homebase later on today. When I come down from having my shower, however, I find that Nadia, my pretty Kazakh cleaning lady, has gone and binned it in a black bag with the rest of the rubbish. How long, I wonder, is it going to take to explain everything to her? Although I'm sure it is perfectly within the realms of possibility to be eco-friendly and have a job all at the same time, as yet I can't quite see how.

Wednesday 10am

The nanny, whom I've banned from doing the weekly shop because a) supermarkets put local farmers out of business with all their ludicrously low prices and b) I promised I'd do

for the first time since I took up the challenge, a wave of irritation washes over me as I try and cram all this stuff I never asked for (rhubarb? What do you do with rhubarb?) into every available kitchen orifice. My mood is not good at the moment, it has to be said. Nick's noticed it, the nanny's noticed it and so have the children. I'll put this down either to the emotional "detox" process every eco-convert has to work through or the switch I have made

wearing my red paisley People Tree dress and listening to a programme about intensive cattle farming on Radio 4, I begin to feel really quite smug. Two weeks? I can do this for the rest of my life. On the way home, I stop in at The Organic Pharmacy on the King's Road to replace all the stuff I've just thrown out from both my bathroom cabinets.

Actually that's a lie, I've just put it all to one side. It feels like such a waste chucking stuff out which is so prettily packaged. And besides, cosmetics don't really count, do they? Do they ever. Margo Marrone, the pharmacy's founder, tells me that the eco-looking cleanser and moisturiser I've been using for the past five years is absolutely laced with parabens (the endocrine disruptors associated with breast cancer). And so is everything else in my bathroom cabinet. Uh-oh, supermarket-sweep time once again. I stagger out with everything



Kathy Phillips

*Director of
beauty range
This Works*

- "I have been using the juice from fresh lemons as a deodorant for two years. It is a Brazilian tradition and I find it also protects my T-shirts"
- Has put her pension and savings into ethical funds. "I chose this option through my financial consultants, St James' Place Partnership [020 7495 1771]"
- Does her weekly organic food shop at Fresh & Wild (Freshandwild.com)
- "I have tried to be as ethical as I possible in producing my beauty range, This Works [020 7584 1887]. For example, the card I have used for packaging the products comes from a sustainable source and all the oils used in the products are 100 per cent organic"

from mascara to tampons, all clearly labelled 100 per cent organic. Gosh, when I think of all those proven carcinogens I've been slathering over my precious babies' bodies all this time...

Tuesday 6pm

Before going out to the theatre, I wash my face with my new organic carrot scrub and spray it with my new organic plant-extract water. In the middle of the second act, my friend Nicola, who is sitting next to me, loudly announces that my face smells of wee.

Wednesday 8.30am

Boo-hoo. The man came to collect my hybrid car. That's the first bummer. The second is that the little red paisley dress from People Tree only really works if I wear it with this one specific cardie which, for all I know, could have been made in an Indian sweatshop by a child not much bigger than my six-year-old. The third is that Yvonne, our cleaning lady in the country, has just called to say the dog from next door has been at my compost heap.



Sheherazade Goldsmith

Mother

- Buys all her organic food at Here in the Chelsea Farmers' Market (020 7351 4321), which sources all its food products from the UK. "If I have to go to a supermarket, I generally find Waitrose to be the best"
- Recommends Liz Earle beauty products (01983 813913) and always goes to The Organic Pharmacy on the King's Road (020 7351 2232) to buy her shampoo. "It is made up of entirely natural products. Often, just because something is organic doesn't mean it is free from products such as paraffin"
- For her three children, she buys mattresses, bedding and some clothing from Willie Winkies in Exeter (01392 410330). "They have especially good babygros made from organic cotton"
- "My husband Zac and I try to be aware of the environment in every part of our lives. Even when we go to our house in Devon twice a month, we travel by train and don't use our car"

Wednesday 6.58pm

Wearing nothing remotely fair trade, second-hand, hemp-based or bio-dynamic, I am now sitting in the red bar at the Leicester Square Odeon, having a cocktail before the premiere of Roland Emmerich's eco-disaster blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow*. Sitting at the next-door table are the film's star, Jake Gyllenhaal, his sister Maggie and his girlfriend Kirsten Dunst, all of whom, I notice rather primly, are puffing away on rollies. We have been invited here by my new best friend, Dan Morrell, founder of a company called Future Forests. An extremely personable, somewhat spivvy figure of a man (who used to be in the record business), Morrell proudly explains

how *The Day After Tomorrow* is the second "carbon neutral" film ever made (the first being Bertolucci's *The Dreamers*). By this he means that Emmerich has paid him to plant a forest somewhere to compensate for all the CO² emissions that were generated in the making of his film. Morrell is brilliant at selling trees to celebrities. Leo DiCaprio, for example, has four forests. Brad Pitt has one in Bhutan. Coldplay have one in India and Jake Gyllenhaal has one in Mozambique. There are plenty of other carbon-neutral celebrities, too. Dido, Neneh Cherry, Damien Hirst, the Foo Fighters... Now, would I, Morrell wonders, like to join the gang, and become a carbon-neutral



Jo Wood

Mother

- "For eating out, The River Café [020 7386 4200] does wonderful organic food, although the restaurant is not 100 per cent organic"
- Shops at Green Fibres in Totnes (01803 868001) for all her bedlinen and towels
- Buys her organic meat, fish and vegetables from Swaddles Farm (01460 234387)
- Makes her own organic beauty oils for the family. "I love natural products and am in the process of formulating my own range of organic oils"
- Recommends investing in Future Forests (Futureforests.com) to help combat travel pollution. "We have a wood called The Ronnie Wood wood in Mozambique"

citizen, too? He'll do it for, "Oooh, let's think now, how does £150 a year sound to you?"

Thursday 11am

I am now beginning to feel very much "part of the gang", wearing my special carbon neutral badge, my "unexploited" T-shirt from People Tree (the very same one Chris Martin was recently photographed in) and carrying my toddler in the bright red babysling I just picked up from Green Baby in Notting Hill, where everyone from Gwyneth Paltrow to Cate Blanchett to Kate Moss goes to get fair-trade babygros, chemical-free baby wipes and 100 per cent organic cotton cot bedding. OK, I haven't gone crop-slashing yet and I didn't join that World Naked Bike Ride that met in Bayswater last month to protest against oil dependency, but in other respects I'm becoming the very model of a LOHAS (that's

someone who leads a lifestyle of health and sustainability, in marketing-speak). This means taking my charger out of the wall if my mobile's not plugged into it, keeping a copy of *The Ecologist* rather than *Heat* by the loo, and swapping the conflict-diamond studs in my ears, which I bought for a ludicrously low price on a trip to Beirut, for a pair from Wint & Kidd, who promise to spend at least part of their profits on an orphanage in Namibia. It means, too, taking the Underground after dinner at The Ivy if no-one is going my way. "What on earth is that?" my friend Adrian cried out in horror when I showed him my Oyster Card.

Thursday 8pm

Nick says I'm becoming a real eco-bore and threatens to give all the money he would have spent on my birthday presents to the homeless instead, but I know he is only kidding. Please, oh please, let one of them be a Marc Jacobs skirt... and one a Brabantia twin-bin.



Alastair Sawday

*Publisher of
The Fragile
Earth books*

- Owns a Volkswagen car that runs entirely on vegetable oil. "My wife's car is a Volkswagen Golf converted to run on LPG gas, which is half the cost of petrol and reduces harmful emissions by up to 90 per cent"
- Recommends The Soil Association's website (Soilassociation.org) for its directory of organic-food suppliers, and The Big Barn (Bigbarn.co.uk) for local organic suppliers
- Uses Ecover cleaning products and bio-degradable bin bags in the house, and has organic compost on his allotment
- "I always make sure that I buy shower gels and shampoos free from laureth sulphate"
- Has an account with Triodos Bank, a Dutch ethical bank
- "For clothes, the first port of call for my sons is Howies [01239 614122], a small ethical clothing company"

Friday 7.30am

No Brabantia twin-bin. But I did get the Marc Jacobs skirt. I am thrilled, too, when the very last present has been opened, the very last card read out, to hear my elder son Flynn suggesting I make myself a dress with all the left-over wrapping paper. See, the message is

definitely spreading. Nadia, our cleaning lady, for example, seems to be getting on very well indeed with the cache of Ecover products



Geetie Singh

*Founder of Britain's
first organic pub,
The Duke of Cambridge
in Islington*

- Buys her ethical and organic clothing from Katharine Hamnett (020 7354 2111) and Natural Connection (Natural-connection.com). Her handbags come from her friend Louise Kamara's range, which is made from 100 per cent recycled materials (available at Boom Creative Interiors, 020 7722 6622).
- "I have never bought diamonds, gold or silver jewellery for ethical reasons. Instead, I choose to buy antique jewellery"
- Recommends the Farmers' Markets at Broadway, Islington and Stoke Newington for seasonal fresh organic produce (for details, call 020 7704 9659)
- Loves Doctor Hauschka beauty products and Aveda shampoos
- Regularly eats at Locanda Locatelli (020 7935 9088) or one of her pubs, the Duke of Cambridge in Islington (020 7359 3066) and The Crown by Victoria Park in east London (020 8981 9998), the only Soil Association-certified organic pubs in the world. "We address every angle of ethical and organic living at our pubs so that our customers don't have to, from making our own crisps to avoid unnecessary packaging to using wind- and solar-sourced electricity"

I bought her from Fresh & Wild, telling me the washing powder reminds her of the brand everybody had to use in Russia before the fall of communism. She also tells me that because it's not as good as the chemical stuff we usually use, she's having to do a lot more washes. I wonder how this will affect our electricity bill.

I wonder, too, where one actually draws the line. One of my favourite make-up brands, for example, isn't organic but it gives millions of pounds to Aids charities. Another favourite company, which is organic, and does wonderful things with a women's collective in the eastern Amazon, is owned by a huge multinational

corporation. Then what about Seeds of Change, which is owned by Mars, Ben & Jerry's, which is co-owned by Unilever... Ouch, all this "eco-glitz" is starting to make my brain hurt a bit. There's that niggling cost question, too. Organic soap powder, deodorant and toothpaste are all a wonderful idea in theory, but if it's that much more expensive than the "bad" stuff (which it invariably is), and it's not doing the job as well either (which it isn't), aren't I eventually going to have to educate the children at home in order to keep it all up?

POSTSCRIPT

It is nearly two weeks now since I've come off the experiment and predictably some of my good habits have worn off. I had a Twix last night, for example; and, because the council haven't delivered any new orange recycling bags for a while, I haven't been nearly as diligent about recycling as I should. Meanwhile, we're back on good old Ariel and the inside of our fridge is beginning to look like the Black Museum at Scotland Yard, we've got so much organic stuff in there quietly going off. I haven't redone the house in organic paint (as did Kate Goldsmith, née Rothschild, after she had her first baby), I haven't stopped drinking Diet Coke (well everyone's got to have something, haven't they?) and I haven't yet managed to go a whole day without eating meat, as Trewin strongly urged I should (and I should, considering how cattle farming has virtually laid waste to all the forests in Costa Rica). Nor have I kicked up much of a fuss at our school about organic lunches, as has Sheherazade Goldsmith, who tells me her child now takes in a packed organic lunch and a pint of organic milk every morning. All the compost I'd so assiduously saved, meanwhile, (almost to the point of nicking stuff from other people's bins) had to be chucked out with the rest of the rubbish, because Roger, the gardener, said it was attracting rats.

At the same time, it's by no means back to square one, as a visit to a friend's house the other day perfectly illustrated. Having just had her kitchen redone, she proudly showed me its *pièce de résistance* – two sparkly side-by-side dishwashers. Normally I'd be gnawing my knuckles with jealousy. In the event I had to mentally stop myself from giving her a small lecture on her eco-faux pas. Can you spread the message without being a bore? Probably not, so I shall continue doing what I can manage without causing too much disturbance to my life and the lives of those around me, in the fresh belief that every little bit really does help after all. As some eco-bore once said, ever been in bed with a mosquito? ■

The proceeds of this feature were not donated to charity