

## 2007/03: Freegan To Ultra Luxury - If It's Green, It's All Good

contributed by Peggy Farabaugh [co-owner, Vermont Woods Studios / green advocate / lover of luxury]

Everyone has such a passionate position on green. It used to be so polarizing. Like politics and religion, you couldn't really talk about it without starting an all out war. To be considered ecologically responsible you had to live the most monkish existence to be even the lightest shade of green. Birkenstocks, hemp clothing, strictly locally grown organic foods (certainly no packaged Doritos, please) - these were all a must. Like today's Freegans, preferably you also lived "off the grid" - that is to say, no electricity unless you were generating your own through solar, wind, or compost. No cars - you had to bike to work. And certainly no vacations involving air travel as planes require too much fossil fuel consumption.

### Green With Envy

I love these ideals. I've always wanted to be like that and envied my friends who were, but somehow reality got in my way. Work often meant a long commute. I never had time to tend a vegetable garden properly. Although I dearly loved to try, wrinkled organic clothing wasn't very acceptable at work. And my favorite indulgence was - and still is - traveling to foreign lands, connecting with nature and people of other races and cultures. With all these despicable tendencies, how could I possibly have dared to call myself green?

But now things are different. Maybe it's because there is such an urgent need for new members in Club Green. The initiation requirements have loosened up, and I think it's a great thing. There are many millions of people who live affluent lifestyles who also love nature's beauty and want to preserve it for future generations. Should they really be excluded because they have the means to own two (or three or four) homes, a private jet, a yacht, and lists of other resource-consuming indecencies? With an ecological footprint that big, how can they possibly have the nerve to call themselves green?

### Shades Of Green

Perhaps it's the reality of global warming, but now I see my tree-hugging friends taking the position that this planet is big enough for all shades of green. They recognize that we won't have much of a future - green or otherwise - unless we can recognize and promote green supporters in all their many variations. Purity is wonderful, but as long as the laws of human nature are around, my friends realize that we're not going to be able to win this revolution if we expect everyone to give up their extravagances.

Green luxury opportunities are all around us and growing everyday. They are becoming a significant part of the solution. Eco-tourism has had enormous success and growth over the last decade. Wealthy eco-travelers are experiencing a closeness to nature that ignites their passion and not only sensitizes them about the need to go green, but also inspires them to come home and tell their friends, neighbors, and relatives about the urgent need to protect these magnificent places.

At the same time, these affluent travelers are supporting indigenous peoples and promoting sustainability in those economies. Rainforest tours are replacing slash and burn and clear-cutting processes that would otherwise be decimating the forest and its inhabitants and replacing them with ill-suited agriculture for soy or beef production.

### The Color Is Money

The wealthy are ready, willing, and able to help in this great green cause of ours. I recently read that about two-thirds of all charitable giving in the United States today comes from the most affluent three percent of American households. I wonder what percentage of their donations is directed toward green causes? I've done some informal

investigations into the extent of green commerce that the wealthy engage in, compared to the percentage for the middle class. I have no numbers to back me up and haven't been able to find any research on this subject, but it appears on the surface to be about the same.

Entrepreneurs from all sectors of the economy would do well to offer new and exciting opportunities for the rich to indulge in green luxury. In my eco-furniture business, we offer several lines &ndash; from affordable to custom to ultra luxury &ndash; of handcrafted artisan items designed for the most exclusive homes, salons, five-star hotels, yachts, and private jets in the world. We've built our business to serve everyone who loves nature and wants to be part of the solution. Amongst our customers we find a powerful kinship that transcends the boundaries of income and is fueled by the exciting reality that, through their purchases, they are all helping to change the world for the better.

Remember: Every little bit helps.