

Dare to be Different

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of

AlterNATION



Reduce, reuse, recycle – it’s not just a slogan, it’s a way of life. And today, the concept is becoming more and more prevalent in the fashion industry. DIY fashion is not only creative, affordable and fun, but it is now what’s “in style.”

Fabric fanatics Shannon Okey and Alexandra Underhill would like to see everyone, coast to coast, daring to be different by revamping clothing in their own style. Shannon and Alexandra (Xan) are authors of the hot new book called *AlterNATION*. Recently released, the book shares tips, tricks, and project ideas to create unique styles with maximum impact and minimal cost.

“When you make your own clothes, they’re truly one of a kind,” said Shannon. “No worries about showing up at a party or event wearing the same outfit as four other people. No more cookie cutter catalog dictators telling you what to wear. No more buying everything off the rack. No more spending \$200 on a pair of the latest jeans when you can make something two hundred times cooler for five dollars and a little sewing time.”

Set the trends, don’t follow them -- that’s the operating principle behind *AlterNATION*, and it all starts by simply digging through old clothes. Great finds are in the back of the closet, in the attic, and at your nearest thrift shop.

“We like to see people taking initiative,” said Xan. “One of the challenges in thrift store makeovers is that you never get exactly the same piece twice. It’s not like buying a pattern and fabric where, if you really want to, you can make 10 of the

LACED PANTS

You can open up the side of a pair of pants and add contrasting colors or textures plus grommeted lacing like the ones pictured here. It’s a fun way to add a new look to your pants and it also offers some extra “give.”

TIE SKIRT

Tie skirts are being seen in galleries and boutiques from coast to coast. You can make them long, to wear like a traditional skirt, or abbreviated, to be worn over pants. These are showstoppers no matter where you live.

same thing. So, while our book offers step-by-step instructions for all the items in the book, they're really only a starting point. We'd like readers to discover new materials they can work with to create truly unique clothing and accessories."

Take a shrunken \$200 cashmere sweater for example. If it's been living in the back of the closet simply out of guilt, Shannon says, "Liberate it and turn it into a felted collar for a coat." Another example is all those old ties that never get worn. Xan says, "Use that boatload of ties to make a tie skirt!"

Xan and Shannon hope their AlterNATION concept will have everyone reconsidering all wearable items. They said last year quite a few t-shirt makeover books came out.

"T-shirts are just one garment," Shannon noted. "We'd like to see people rethinking everything from their pants and skirts to their jackets and accessories!"

Denim skirts can be very fun to revamp -- when you see the skirt photo on the next page, you'll see the denim ballgown skirt was made with lots of extra denim panels. Now it's swooshy, kicky and fun to wear, not to mention more flattering than the usual ultra-tight jean skirt. (Directions for this transformation are included in the AlterNATION book along with steps for making a denim corset skirt, an asymmetrical sheet skirt, a panel skirt made from corduroy pants legs, a tie skirt, and a dual fabric skirt of denim and rayon.)

Peeking further into the book, you'll find directions for making 25+ fashion projects. Some go by plain and simple titles such as T-Shirt Dress or Trimmed Pants, while others have much bolder names like Day of the Dead Jacket, Dangerous Cherry Handbag, Tie Store Explosion Collar and Bedhead Top. The ideas in this book are outstanding and endless.

According to Xan and Shannon, there are many benefits to "turning your back on the mall" and setting your own trends to show off your own style. They said it's ecologically friendly and you are guaranteed to be unique, but there is something else too -- you have a connection to a garment that you made yourself.

Continued on page 8



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Shannon explained, "You are less likely to get tired of it and throw it out when you've made it yourself. If you look at the average European woman's closet, they have a fraction of the clothes your average American does. Their clothes are all made better, fit better, and are meant to last longer."

Continuing in the same vein, she thought it was funny when a German colleague of hers refused to buy a shirt that was on super-deep discount, even though she really loved it, just because the sleeves were half an inch too long. Shannon commented, "I can respect that. I'd rather everyone had fewer pieces that they truly adore than a closet full of stuff they never wear."

As an independent sewing dealer, the AlterNATION concept is definitely one you should incorporate into your class schedule. A whole new category of customers can be drawn in, and by targeting this new group, your store can become a wonderful hub of creativity.

How do you do this?

Xan and Shannon say it's easy. Their advice: "Make samples to show your customers what's possible. Set up a workshop day where people can come in and try out new techniques. And if all else fails...we teach workshops!"

Shannon, who is the co-owner of an independent fiber/fabric/classes shop, knows firsthand that students often get nervous about 'ruining' their materials, so she suggests you set things up so your customers can try techniques in small doses. Whether it's screening a design onto a small piece of fabric or cutting up old sweaters to make scarves with a rotary cutter and quilt template, small doses help customers achieve confidence for the next, bigger step of the revamping process.

DENIM BALLGOWN SKIRT

This skirt is so fun, not to mention much more flattering than the usual ultratight jeans skirt made from only one pair. It can be worn with a simple tank, as seen here, or a plain white buttondown for a more preppy look.

TRIMMED PANTS

This is a simple project that adds an extra bit of wardrobe "oomph!" You'll probably spend more time picking out the trim than you will actually spend sewing it on! You can also use this approach on denim jackets -- the sleeves look really cool when cut to three-quarter length and embellished with trim.



PIECED PANTS

These pants are an example of "more is more." For the most visual impact, add as many different fabric types as you can. These pants look best with wildly contrasting colors, prints and textures.

"There are lots of ways to get customers excited and it might only cost you a few dollars at the thrift store," Shannon added. "Have a Project Runway-themed in-store contest where teams of contestants compete to transform a stack of materials you provide into a garment. Or if you stock sewing patterns, challenge your customers to make a certain pattern using only items they find at Goodwill -- then have a trunk show or Project Runway 'catwalk' party."

However you promote the AlterNATION concept, Xan and Shannon recommend you get your customers to do the work for you. One idea they suggest is after you sponsor a contest (such as the one mentioned above) then put the winning garments on display.

"Do it thematically," they said. "Perhaps do a contest in December that makes over old sweaters and one in the summer that overhauls old skirts."

DIY has always been part of the creative life, but Xan and Shannon said they see it becoming more widespread as people tire of looking like everyone else. As a retailer, embracing this new concept can turn profitable for you. With little effort on your part, you can attract this 20-30-40-age segment of the market that EVERYONE is trying to reach.

Customizing clothes can transform your world and your customer's world.

You can order AlterNATION and offer the book as well as the concept in your store. Copies are available through all major book wholesalers and also directly through the publisher, North Light/F+W Publications Inc. 4700 East Galbraith Road, Cincinnati, OH 45236. David & Charles distributes the book in the UK, and Capricorn Wholesalers handles it in Australia/NZ.

You can also read more about AlterNATION, submit photos from related contests and events at your store and much more at www.alternationbook.com.

If you are interested in having Xan and Shannon present workshops and seminars at your store, contact them at shannon@alternationbook.com or xan@alternationbook.com 🐾



Photographs in this article courtesy of Slade Photography, Los Angeles

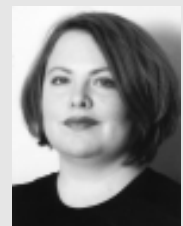
About the Authors of **AlterNATION**

Alexandra (Xan) Underhill is an ultratalented sculptor in all mediums, including fabric. She's done costuming for many theatrical and dance productions and is best known for her tie skirts, which she demo'ed on the crafty TV show *Uncommon Threads*, as well as her stilt dancing. Xan teaches at workshops all over the place and has a fabric stash to die for.

Shannon Okey is a fiber fanatic who knits, spins, crochets, dyes, felts, and much more. She's got multiple spinning wheels, knitting machines and looms, as well as fiber by the pound in her studio. Shannon's best known for her *Knitgrrl* books and several other crafty titles. She has appeared on *Uncommon Threads*, *Knitty Gritty* and *Crafters Coast to Coast*, coordinates the Cleveland edition of indie craft fair Bazaar Bizarre, is a columnist for *knit.1* magazine and is a frequent contributor to magazines such as *CRAFT*, *Adorn* and *Yarn Market News*.



Alexandra (Xan)
Underhill



Shannon Okey