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A BioCouture Ruff jacket

Growth Industry

Kombucha couture (yes, grow your own clothes).

By Howie Kahn

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Suzanne Lee, a 42-year-old former research fellow at London's Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, wants to grow your clothes. "Essentially, it's made from kombucha," Lee says of the fermented-green-tea-based solution she uses to develop fabrics for her company, BioCouture. Bacteria added to the mixture feed on kombucha's natural sugars and yield a filmlike substance that forms at the surface. Once dried, it has the texture of thin leather.

It takes up to four weeks to generate enough of the stuff for a single piece of clothing, and Lee has produced one-off shoes, dresses, and jackets with it. Although the fabric is perfectly suited for this kind of creative experimentation, Lee is keen on changing the future of textile manufacturing. "This has become more of a start-up company than just a fashion line," she says. "A lot of designers and houses are interested in the material." Lee is currently negotiating with backers to improve production. "And it goes far beyond fashion," she adds. "We'll eventually be able to grow a chair, seat coverings for cars—even a house."

Keywords

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Growth Industry: Illustration: Alexandra Compain-Tissier; Jacket: courtesy of Designer