

# green knowledge ledge

FOR FASHION LOVERS

By **J'N'C & TM**

No. 1/2023 — 20 EUR — [greenknowledge.org](http://greenknowledge.org)

## THE COURAGE TO CHANGE

### FASHION FORWARD

The essentialists' motto: Less is more. Their approach: focused, reduced, high-quality, timeless. And therefore all the more in tune with the times.

### TEXTILES & PRODUCTION

Our behind-the-scenes-report on local denim production in Vietnam. We talked to Johan Van den Heede from Advance Denim.

### TRANSFORMATION

Is it really always a good decision to buy second-hand? Not at any price!



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# Munich Fabric Start “The German fashion lacks courage”

Interview: Silke Bucker  
Photos: Sorin Morar

The Munich Fabric Start has been an established feature in the international business accelerator trade fairs since 1996. With continuity, perfect organization, an outstanding hosting mindset, high-quality content, and expertise in trends in all manner of terrain, the event has long since emerged as a lighthouse. We spoke to Managing Director Sebastian Klinder and Creative Director Frank Junker about how the collective call for sustainability in all its facets impacts on the sector, the perception of fashion, the behavior of recipients, and the habits of the industry. We also discussed what commitment is required by all the actors in order collectively to meet the challenges of the required transformation, and why reliability, courage, and quality are values that need to be nurtured once more.



## What can exhibitors and visitors look forward to at the next edition of Munich Fabric Start?

Sebastian Klinder: A whole lot of things. The one ideal date no longer exists given the changed rhythm of collections. So we consulted countless market players and devised a new scheduling concept that distributes two Munich Fabric Starts and two Views optimally across the order year. Using this flexible structure and the different platforms, we seek to offer the industry a perfect opportunity to cherry-pick its themes itself. To summarize: Our guests can look forward to continuity, trade-fair halls that are thumping full, and a Munich Fabric Start with the customary oomph.

## We live in an age of transformation; in particular, recent years have revealed shortcomings, meaning that changes of a structural and substantive nature are imperative. So what does that mean for you as trade-fair organizers?

SK: I have often asked myself: “What is not changing?” And that’s what you are getting at, I mean, Frank, what’s still to change?

Frank Junker: I think that the changes in the zeitgeist we are witnessing also mean that the behavior of our exhibitors and visitors has changed. For example, there’s travel intensity, there’s the size of the teams that travel in for the show, there’s the time spent at the trade fair, and the whole way people work. Companies now think twice: Where do I get the most holistic offers and where can I spend my two or three days at a trade fair most effectively and meaningfully? We definitely get the feeling that all the trade-fair hopping is coming to an end. We’re noticing very clearly how our guests are doing more preparatory work, already scheduling hard-and-fast meetings in advance of the fair, and are more structured in their approach.

## In other words, on the one hand there’s a new sense of staying down-to-earth and, on the other, the trade fair is meant to offer inspiration. Frank, as a creative director, how do you create the right space – and that includes metaphorically?

FJ: We accord great space to inspiration through the zeitgeist and trends; in fact we consistently nurture those topics, with support from the right experts, of course. We definitely understand that not all designers are able to analyze the themes themselves. So we dish up discerning content in clearly marked trend forums in an easily digestible and yet very concrete and competent manner – with statements you can clearly use.

## Two of the values you mention are efficiency and clarity – do they result in certainty?

FJ: Absolutely, absolutely.

SK: I’d call it a good basis for planning in the sense that you get what you expected. Which means for us that we think about exactly what and to whom we present so that there are no surprises. The fact that we’ve managed to keep the Munich Fabric Start at this level bears out our ambitions and the standards we set ourselves. The juxtaposed backdrops that we then stage fittingly in line with the respective thematic focus of the trade fair perfectly complement our concept and our service mindset. Paired with reliability, good organization, and diverse information offerings, not to mention inspiration, this forms our way of remaining successful and meeting the mar-

ket’s needs with great precision. We’ve always had that approach and in this regard don’t let ourselves be influenced by the zeitgeist; to this extent, our emphasis must be on further strengthening these core competences.

## I’d like to concentrate for a minute on the notion of “trend” which for a long time tended to refer to the surface of things.

### What values or aspects constitute the key trends today?

FJ: Apart from aesthetic trends, which of course continue to be of great relevance, it is transparency and comprehensibility that are the defining, innate trends at present. This is the result of two parallel drivers: first, legal obligations such as the German Act on Supply Chain Diligence, and second, the changing moral requirements. For brands, transparency is thus becoming a “hygiene factor” that enables a brand to give the right answers to the question as to how something was manufactured. Another thing I notice is that trends today embody a lot more of the zeitgeist than before. In particular, the way we live, the way everyday life is, the fact that everything is getting faster and more digital... Functionality is the buzzword today. Trends, by contrast, that are influenced by street culture, i.e., that address the classical meaning of the term, are increasingly just becoming bland. In many respects, this is the key to the problem if we talk about sustainability. There is less courage to be individual, even if individuality is paradoxically the order of the day. Put differently, while on the one hand everything is about fashion, many prefer to flee into the purported safety of uniformity, of complete standardization.

“There is less courage to be individual, even if individuality is paradoxically the order of the day. Yet many prefer to flee into the purported safety of uniformity, of complete standardization.”

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## Digitization and sustainability are the key leading themes of the coming fair. So how do the two belong together when you consider merely the hefty negative impacts of booming online business on the eco-balance sheet, given the immensely high returns rate? What are the important parameters to turn this into a win-win situation?

SK: Digitization can help the industry solve the greatest problem of all, namely overproduction. On the basis of specific data and using AI, it will be possible to preselect volumes, sizes, and themes with greater precision. We can become much, much faster and in the final instance realize the idea of becoming a kind of Netflix for fashion. If we as an industry succeed in producing close to actual market requirements, then we wouldn’t need to shred new garments because they have to give way for the next season. Moreover, using the new digital technologies we could adjust processes and be far more precise with content and structures. There’s a lot of potential here to be more sustainable.

**In the narrower sense, the very production of new things is not sustainable, even under the best possible conditions. I also view quality and longevity as sustainability, because it's about things that are here to stay.**

FJ: Exactly! The most sustainable thing you can do is to produce good-quality items.

SK: However, good quality gets us nowhere without good design. What counts is the right product. Take the case of second-hand: If a product is so good, so sexy, that I am able after 15 or 20 years to still take it out of the wardrobe with a look of gratified amazement on my face...

**And what is ostensibly "old" is often more progressive and of a better quality than the constantly "new".**

SK: Indeed! Not so long ago, it was the quality of the products that defined the brand – today branding is a matter of the right photos, the right campaign, the right people. If only in this regard, I think it a matter of course that a vintage product entails the better article, the better finishing.

**And the better story. Especially as the haptic and the analog are increasingly disappearing.**

FJ: At the end of the day, it is the consumer who decides. What doesn't get bought doesn't get produced any longer. We can explain that to people, but we can't of course change behavioral patterns. As trade-fair initiators, we consider our task to be highlighting the opportunities there are and which we can tell stories about. It's about enlightening people.

**"We don't sell square meterage but concepts and know-how."**

Sebastian Klinder

SK: We're not some over-the-counter trade-fair organizer; we're a family business. We organize with a different passion and DNA. We don't sell square meterage but concepts and know-how. And we love bringing people together.

**The "Future Fabrics" are a key segment at the Munich Fabric Start: What properties do fabrics have to have for the future?**

FJ: Transparency and circularity are decisive parameters in this context. Exciting alternative materials made from natural or regenerative sources crop up with each new season, but it's not as though it's all already possible without a negative footprint...there's a long way to go still, I'm afraid.

SK: However, it's great to see how the innovations and pop-ups that get presented at the fair are welcomed, how there's an attempt to integrate them into the market. Of course, these are often still companies that find it tough to meet market requirements. It's a process of development, naturally. But there's a great need, there's demand, so that, God willing, we'll start thinking deeply about alternatives.

**I think that many up-and-coming designers regard achieving sustainability as a given.**

SK: Yes, we're seeing an integrative standard evolving. No start-up can sidestep doing justice to the topic.

FJ: And that's a huge step if you think about all the places where sustainability is a matter of course out of tradition, or where it's a start-up. Back in the 1980s, we were still taking to the streets and calling for jute bags instead of plastic bags!

**Needless to say, there is now pressure, on the other hand, to implement things faster. Not least, the pandemic showed that. Do you have the feeling that the learning curve we went through then will endure, as regards our industry that is?**

SK: I think it definitely won't. Well, OK, that's not true of all market players. There's so much pressure that certain companies now have to act worse than they ever did pre-pandemic. Others have recognized the opportunities, and for them the pandemic may have functioned as a catalyst to invest in innovations, to address new themes, to review existing business models, or to identify niches. Others, however, have an awful lot of catching up to do, have had to write off immense sums. And then pressed "restart" in the belief that "Now we've really got to go for it!"

FJ: Let me take up that point. Because everything we experience as trade-fair organizers is essentially a reflection of social developments. If we're talking about the pandemic, then we should remember that in the first phase there was a strong feeling of all being in it together, and it gave way after a while to the opposite. Now, once we've emerged from the pandemic, we're seeing egomania spread fast. No doubt at the core of it there are economic factors in play here, but I must nevertheless say that what we learned from and during the pandemic has not endured and was not sustainable.



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**One key demand today is the courage to change. Do you think this value is being brought to bear, in particular in Germany? Or do you also have the feeling that many are simply tending to withdraw into their safe comfort zones instead of moving forwards?**

SK: That's an important point, and in terms of the German fashion market you're spot on. I believe that, at this very time, leaving that comfort zone is exactly the right step for the one or other brand to take. I see this, for example, in the Italian market, which is presently far more active. Different. More courageous. And I fear that this has something to do with our underlying German mindset. As long as things somehow function, they stay the way they are. The German market is definitely characterized by not having enough courage.

**Does that not also have to do with a feeling of lacking something, i.e., that in Germany fashion has never been treated as a cultural asset?**

SK: Most definitely.

FJ: At least not the way it certainly deserves.

SK: Fashion here is simply "clothes"...

FJ: We were saying recently that at the Pitti Uomo in Florence there were pink jackets on display; I don't really see German men wearing them to the office at the moment, while Italians respond by saying: Wow, that looks great!

**"If you cast a glance at the brands doing it differently, then their success proves that courage pays off."**

Sebastian Klinder

SK: I think opportunities simply get missed; it's a dilemma, it's sad, and German fashion doesn't deserve it. And if you cast a glance at the brands doing it differently, then their success proves that courage pays off.



**The denim market is demonstrating a lot of innovative prowess as regards sustainability – and you're dedicating a special zone to it: the Bluezone. What do you feel makes the topic so exciting?**

SK: Denim is the most democratic fabric per se; denim has always been a different textile product. But it's also a material that entails enormous production inputs. To this extent, the brands present themselves differently and are perceived much more as ingredient brands. The efforts to make denim better and cleaner aren't new. After all, we all know that the impacts are so severe, making it all the better that from all sides so much effort is going into improving things in this regard. It's amazing how much innovation is to be seen every six months on the different preproduction platforms.

**For many years, the jeans industry was inconceivable without Spandex; now, silhouettes are getting wider again, materials less blended, both of which help circularity.**

SK: For me, that for example is a phenomenon where the trend results from the wish for sustainability. If I as a manufacturer know that I won't achieve the sustainability goals I have been set, then I need to develop a different product.

FJ: What I have noticed in recent years, and even before the pandemic, is that the denim mills are now tending to position themselves as brands in their own right. For a long time they were simply below the radar, all we saw was G-Star, Diesel, or Replay. And no one was interested in who or what was behind those brands. The market as a whole is benefiting from the fact that now these preproduction manufacturers are clearly and transparently communicating the seriousness of their efforts to create better fabrics. This way, the goods that Diesel, for example, procures have a face of their own.

**On the topic of transparency: The jungle of quality seals and certificates is very opaque; in particular, global business relationships mean that only individual stages of what are frequently unbelievably long supply chains get certified. How can we achieve genuine and unequivocal transparency for consumers?**

SK: I believe that's only possible with uniform, multinational laws.

FJ: Given all the obligations, problems, difficulties, and tasks that have to be mastered, along with the justifications for things, in Germany fun and joy in fashion all too often fall by the wayside. Of course, the industry needs to be more sustainable, but all the laws, rules, and certificates rob the profession and the recipients of the fun in fashion and instead fuel a bad conscience. Yet fashion really is something marvelous!

**Which brings us to the topic of valuing things, of how we consume things.**

FJ: And here again, we need to preserve our joy in things! That makes you automatically more independent and reflective in your decision-making, frees you of the feeling you need to have something because others have it. That's what I would call a real feel for style.

SK: So let me ask again: How do we regain our sense of lightness, bring the bad conscience in consumerism to an end? We can only succeed here if we know that there is a way out of



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overproduction, that a product is circular, that supply chains are transparent, and certificates internationally standardized. If we find the right answers to these questions, then the joy in fashion will return.

**Let's talk about second-hand and vintage garments, areas that are currently gaining in esteem and acceptance, perhaps also because of some sense of nostalgia in society. How do you gauge the potential for this market, in particular as regards your event, which per se relies on newness?**

SK: Of course, at first you think that the offering of a sourcing fair and the second-hand market torpedo each other. But for me, first and foremost, every purchase in a second-hand shop is a very correct one – because it stands for a change in thinking. The actual intention behind it is: I want to do something different. If the next generation acts this way because maybe they have to watch their money and they don't want to buy fast fashion but still want to look good, then second-hand fashion is a perfect alternative. Moreover, this kind of consumer behavior trains people to regain a feeling for quality, a sense of "we are in the midst of a huge change; I should embrace it and

respond to it". Everyone bears responsibility for developing marketable and good products to fit into the circular economy. Second-hand is one opportunity that brands can also use for themselves, and that doesn't mean just the big online players who are already operating in the field.

FJ: Buying vintage and second-hand basically fulfils several needs: It is cheaper and also offers the surprise factor, because you never know beforehand what you will discover. On top of that, it's always a good purchase decision that makes the question of sustainability obsolete, because I'm buying something that already exists. And last but not least, you have the opportunity to craft an individual look, so this market may even rekindle the desire for fashion in general.

SK: The only thing is: When can a product make it into the second-hand shop? When the quality is really good. And it's so great when I can attract customers sustainably through this quality, so that they find pieces they can maybe even pass on to the next generation.

**Many thanks for the open and inspiring conversation!**

[munichfabricstart.com](http://munichfabricstart.com)

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**THE NEXT EDITION OF MUNICH FABRIC START WILL TAKE PLACE FROM JULY 18 –20, 2023, AT THE MOC SITE IN MUNICH.**