



From Clean Living to Tidy Profits

Thought piece

ALPHA LTD

St Andrew's House
St Andrew's Road
Cambridge CB4 1DL
United Kingdom

 @thisisalphalive

thisisalpha.com

The concept of 'clean living' had been bubbling away as a sub-culture for decades, centuries even. Then, in the late noughties, some kind of nutrition cataclysm erupted and, suddenly, clean living – which includes clean eating, green living, and being carbon-footprint conscious – has become part of normal life for Western society. To those who embrace it wholeheartedly, it is a transformative lifestyle experience, like a religion; the sceptics, on the other hand, are at great pains to shout about 'fake news' and unscientific, or unfounded research as being the real truth behind clean living, in some or all of its many forms. But no matter if you're for or against it, the clean living industry is here to stay – and it's increasing its reach.

We find it in every corner of our lives – what we eat, where we live, what we wear, how we travel. Everything is becoming cleaner – though often in increments that are a lot smaller than we give people credit for, and with a fair amount of 'joking the stats' taking place – think about VW and the car emissions scandal.

Clean eating

Clean eating is all about the feel-good factor. It's not so much whether a certain product or food type benefits your actual health, but whether you believe it's healthy (whether you actually are or not, is open to a lot of well documented, widely publicised debate¹). The lexicon associated with clean living is, strangely, intoxicating. It's about food that's 'pure'; 'whole'; 'real'; 'raw'; 'natural'; 'clean'; 'organic' – it feels good just to read the words. Eating the food will take you to the next level. Words like 'processed'; 'pesticides'; and 'additives' are aggressively marketed as the bad guys. These tactics feed an industry that is worth millions and continues to grow. Once esoteric foodstuffs – chia seeds, kale, goji berries, to name but a few – now line our supermarket shelves, and they're expensive. Clean-eating gurus like Ella Mills, Amelia Freer and the Helmsley sisters have almost filled bookshops with their nutrition bibles. Whether the food is good for us or not, we want to believe.

Clean residing

During the last couple of years, there's been a real push to create more eco-friendly housing, across all levels of society, using "new materials, ever-better photovoltaic cells and ultra-efficient insulation."² Websites have sprung up to help the average Joe and Jane get a handle on how to build an eco-home. From lists of materials to advice on how to deal with buying the land to all you need to know about MVHR (mechanical ventilation with heat recovery) among other things.³

According to shrinkthatfootprint.com, the five basic factors that have to be addressed for the creation of truly effective eco-housing are "efficiency, energy production, house size, location and embodied carbon."⁴ The site goes on to say that desirability in itself is also a serious determining 'eco-factor'.

Desperate to be seen to get in on the green scene, in 2007 the UK Government introduced the Code for Sustainable Homes to improve all eco-factors associated with housing, intending that, by 2016, all new homes would be carbon-rated zero.⁵ As with many well-meant plans, things have overrun a little. But, with TV shows like *Grand Designs* playing their part in keeping a focus on eco-living, there might be a zeitgeist movement afoot. These reality TV shows are inspiring, both in an eco-aspirational sense and in a 'keeping up with the Joneses sense'. More than ever, the property market is viewing sustainability credentials as central to the overall value of a building. For new builds in particular, eco-features are often some of the most exciting and sellable aspects of a new development.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/aug/11/why-we-fell-for-clean-eating>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jan/03/architecture-and-sustainable-eco-homes>

³ <https://www.homebuilding.co.uk/what-is-an-eco-home/>

⁴ <http://shrinkthatfootprint.com/beautiful-eco-houses>

⁵ <http://www.the-self-build-guide.co.uk/eco-homes.html>

Clean dressing

What else does a clean-living person do? Wear the right kind of clothing. There's plenty of choice online from specialist retailers but, lately, global brands such as H&M and Zara have been upping their green credentials by committing to producing collections that are made of materials such as organic cotton and recycled wool.⁶

If you want to be seen to making an eco-effort, sites like [People Tree](#) and [Gudrun Sjödén](#) are an ideal starting point. With pages of manifestos and detailed breakdowns of product sourcing and production, accompanied by a parade of colourful infographics, you can calculate how clean and green your wardrobe will be after a just a few minor spending sprees. Then, you can recycle all those non-green clothes in your wardrobe and feel even better.

Companies like People Tree are serious about what they promise and what they are confident that they achieve. A flick through their latest Social Review⁷, a 37-page document which details every aspect of the company's ethical plan of action, shows that just fulfilling one part of the process isn't enough – it has to be an end-to-end process, or what is achieved means practically nothing.

Clean travelling

And what about those car emissions? Even though the long-fought-for Paris Agreement has received a massive blow with the withdrawal of the US after President Trump's election, there are plenty of world leaders who still believe in it, and car emissions are one source of pollution where both experts and politicians feel they have a shot at making a real change.

With a growing number of electric and hybrid models on the market, if you're thinking about investing in a new car, there's no excuse not to buy one. If you need more proof, let the numbers do the talking, especially if you're in line for a company car. UK government policies aimed at the most polluting cars came into effect in 2015. Company car drivers were hit with sharp rises in the rate of tax, based on carbon dioxide emissions. "The average new car emits 128.3g/km of CO₂, putting it in a band in which company-car tax of 18% of the vehicle's list price is payable. Next year that will rise to 20%. A car emitting 75g/km CO₂ or less will be charged at only 9%."⁸

⁶ <https://www.zara.com/uk/en/sustainability-products-11455.html>

⁷ <http://www.peopletree.co.uk/about-us/social-review->

⁸ <https://www.driving.co.uk/car-clinic/buying-guide-25-best-eco-cars-for-every-occasion/>

Travelwise, the other massive carbon emitter is air travel. And that's a hard one to tackle because there's no getting away from the stupendous amount of fuel required for even the shortest of short-haul flights. Off-setting – paying a higher price for tickets, a chunk of which will be used to reverse the effect of carbon emissions – is partly a solution, but fliers need to do their research first so they can be confident that their £10 (or whatever) is going towards a genuine re-forestation or similar project. Some airlines are better than others but, as with guides on car emissions and green-driving, there is a mind-boggling array of stats and figures at hand, which can confuse as well as inform the debate.⁹

Knowledge equals power

From the clothes we wear through the food we eat to the houses we live in, every aspect of 21st-century life has been influenced by rapid growth in both availability of and preferences for clean lifestyle choices. Of course, it's incredibly important to sort out the organic wheat from the GM chaff. In the consumer choices we make, we need transparent information as to the real sustainability impacts of the products we buy. Only then does our purchasing power really help to realise the clean-living dream.

⁹<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/if-you-travel-and-care-about-environment-you-should-buy-carbon-offsets-180952222/>

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