Wearing White After Labor Day Is Now Officially Just Fine, Betabrand Declares

Now that Labor Day is in the rearview mirror and cooler weather is starting to set in, millions of Americans will survey their summer wardrobes and decide that it's time to put the whites away for the season. After all, as everyone knows, you're not supposed to wear white after Labor Day, right?

Well, maybe.

Last week, San Francisco-based online apparel company Betabrand issued an announcement that it was now officially OK to wear white all the way until Halloween. Official—by whose authority? The Joint International Panel on Fashion and Meteorology, based in Geneva, Switzerland, that's who.

According to Betabrand, the JIPFM decreed that, since the planet is heating up anyway, we all might as well keep wearing our whites until fall.

Unfortunately, a quick application of the sniff test (and a web search) reveals that this organization doesn't exist. However, the need to turn heads and sell clothing? That's very real, especially at a time when Americans have cut back on apparel spending. And cooking up a bogus NGO in Switzerland is simply the latest way that Betabrand founder Chris Lindland is churning up attention.

For the uninitiated, Betabrand is an on-demand label that uses crowdsourcing (asking consumers to vote on the styles, cuts and colors they like) to determine what items it offers. Its inventory walks a fine line between the bizarre and the practical: dressy yoga pants, an "executive" hoodie ostensibly suitable for the office, a sport coat that reverses into a

brocade smoking jacket, and so on. The company is also known for its smart and saucy marketing that’s often pegged to social trends.

And that’s why Lindland decided to take on the whole no-white-after-Labor Day thing. With global temperatures rising, the unofficial end of summer didn’t feel like an appropriate time to shelve the summer whites.

“I’ve been in the fashion business for over a decade,” Lindland told Adweek, “and I still find it odd to start selling sweaters, jackets, and wooly things when September temperatures couldn’t be hotter.”

Betabrand’s own customers also seem to be at a loss for what’s appropriate to wear. Last week, its bestselling products included lightweight Catstooth pants (a summer holdout) and a black sheep’s wool sweater (definitely for fall). Meanwhile, Betabrand’s chalk-white yoga pants are a perennial fave.

Considering what greenhouse gases are doing to weather patterns overall, Lindland ventures that collections timed to the changing seasons are possibly less relevant than ever. “We’ve gravitated towards seasonless products—a greater industry trend—because it’s becoming a business risk to peg all your hopes on weather behaving precisely like it did in the last century,” he said.

Global warming aside, now seems a good time to give the heave-ho to the old injunction on wearing white after Labor Day, not least because there’s no real authority behind it anyway.

Some believe that the decree grew from a morass of late 19th century social strictures governing how upper class women should and shouldn’t dress. After WWII, women’s magazines

amplified the stricture for a middle class readership anxious to be perceived as cultured. Another theory goes that white clothing—considered to be country house attire by the monied classes—would be put away at the end of summer once the wealthy returned to their homes in the soot-smeared city.

Whatever the edict's origins, however, Lindland is correct in observing that brands (and the public overall) are increasingly ignoring it. Banana Republic's new arrivals for fall included white joggers, rain jackets, sneakers and mock necks. H&M's Fall Essentials for 2020 include white jackets, hoodies, turtlenecks and suit pants.

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