



THIS IS WHAT THE FUTURE LOOKS LIKE

And he's stylish

The world is changing so fast, it's hard to keep up. In fashion, as demand for cotton grows and availability of water supply and land decreases, it's time to look for something else to make clothes with. The fellow in this picture is a crab. Chitin (pronounced "kite-in"), aka his shell, is a natural polymer that can be turned into a fabric, one of a new generation originating from very exotic sources.

"We were designing some mobile phone covers and it turned out they were made of salmon skin. We had no idea!" says Savile Row designer Avigail Claire, adding that the fish fabric "looked better than snakeskin." Salmon, milk, coffee beans, castor oil, nettles and spider are all finding their way into the supply chain too. You might be wearing one of them now and not even know it. The timing of this couldn't be better in the past 18 months, the global price of cotton has doubled. Polyester prices are also rising because they are linked to the price of oil.

For chitin, which can also be found in dragonflies, grasshoppers and beetles, it's still early days. Hundreds of thousands of tonnes of the stuff could be made available for use every year, but so far, the textile industry only asks for a few thousand.

But the story does not end there. There are so many other environmentally-friendly materials that are further along the development cycle. Already in production for relatively small minimum orders – so young designers can afford to design with them – are ramie, cupro, kapok, flax, organic fibres, recycled denim and recycled polyester. Together, these fabrics will never run out. They are part of global fashion's future, a mini-industrial revolution.

TEXT BY JESSICA BRINTON

For more information on these strange new sustainable fabrics, go to www.thesustainableangle.org