

# FROM HERE TO RETURNITY

## – A SMALL-SCALE EFFORT FOR BIG-SCALE CHANGE

BY SUSANNA KUMLIEN

**I**n the former hosiery industrial premises of Triåkfabriken – situated in Hammarby Sjöstad, a renovated dockside district in Stockholm – a bunch of people gathers on a sunny summer afternoon. Their aim is to map and lay down policies and guidelines for implementing the green revolution. As one of the participants puts it later during the meeting – Cradle to Cradle will be the first ever revolution in human history to throughout be a good one.

This will of course not happen overnight. Just like any revolution – or change in a more general sense – the new industrial paradigm will take time and effort to bring about. The people at the meeting come from different backgrounds: here we find designers, a couple of engineers, a photographer, a toxicologist, a textile consultant, a product developer, students in Economy and Crafts Design as well as business developers and environmental consultants. One has spent years doing business in Russia, another is a specialist in construction-work.

Although the Chairman of the meeting, the toxicologist and head of environmental/business consultant Ecoprofits, Magnus Hedmark, is likely to have passed his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, the average age of the participants is probably no more than 30. As the motto – or the marketing slogan – of Cradle to Cradle says: Welcome to join the next industrial revolution!

They want to save the planet, make life better for everyone *and* make business. All at the same time. The network is called Cradlenet and they want to change our wasteful, toxic world. It's about optimizing production cycles, developing take-back-systems, manufacturing without doing any harm to the environment and designing things so that products either can be composted or recycled eternally. "Join us in building a society for the future," Cradlenet announces in a recently produced leaflet. They say that the society of tomorrow is being built today, here and now, with a new, sustainable economy that interacts with the environment and "develops our planet's potential to provide a good life for us all" in a world without any waste. And they all work for free.

Considering only a few months have passed since it was started, Cradlenet has already accomplished some significant results. They arranged the world's first ever C2C fashion show – WASTE=FOOD at Konstfack (Stockholm's University College of Arts Crafts and Design), bringing internationally renowned Cradle to Cradle star Michael Braungart to Sweden, as well as Stef Kranendijk, head of Netherland's carpet giant Desso.

Currently, the network is working on completing a Swedish translation of *Cradle to Cradle – Remaking the way we make things* by McDonough

& Braungart, a book that without exaggeration could be referred to as the C2C Bible. For Cradle to Cradle is also a registered trade mark and a certification owned by MBDC (McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry). Criticism has been advanced on the fact that consultancy and certification is kept within the MBDC inner circle.

The EPEA – Environmental Protection Encouragement Agency – founded and chaired by Braungart, with its headquarters in Hamburg, is the sole C2C certification provider in four European countries and Taiwan.

Experts in the field of environmental protection have questioned the ideology behind C2C. Dr Michael Gendrick of the German Federal Environmental Agency even defines Braungart's statement about the world having sufficient resources as outright dangerous. "Every time a product reaches the end of its life, it becomes waste. There is no way to go around that," he says in a recently released German documentary.

Another critic is Friedrich Fritsch-Bleek, head of the German Wuppertal Institute, who believes it to be completely out of the question that the Cradle to Cradle concept can be realized on a bigger scale. He has called the assertion that the 'old' environmental movement had hindered innovation by its pessimist approach "pseudo-psychological humbug". In Rob van Hattum's film *Waste=Food*, he sits in an Airbus 380, feeling the covers of the seats: "I can feel very comfortable on Michael's seat covers in the airplane. Nevertheless I am still waiting for a detailed proposal for a design of the other 99.99 percent of them according to his principles." A Dutch blog reports that in late 2007 Hans Weijers, Akzo's Chief Executive, already predicted that the guru-like status of Cradle to Cradle's originators, William McDonough and Michael Braungart, wouldn't last two years.

But Weijers can be said to have been proven wrong. In May 2010, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proudly announced the Green Institute to have opened its doors in California. The Green Products Innovation Institute Inc. (GPII) is a non-profit organization with its headquarters in San Francisco. Behind it are companies such

as Herman Miller, Method, Steelcase and other manufacturers of C2C certified products. A press-statement declares that the newly founded institute's aim is "transforming the making and consumption of things into a regenerative force for the planet." The institute will work according to C2C principles, providing C2C certification and educational efforts.

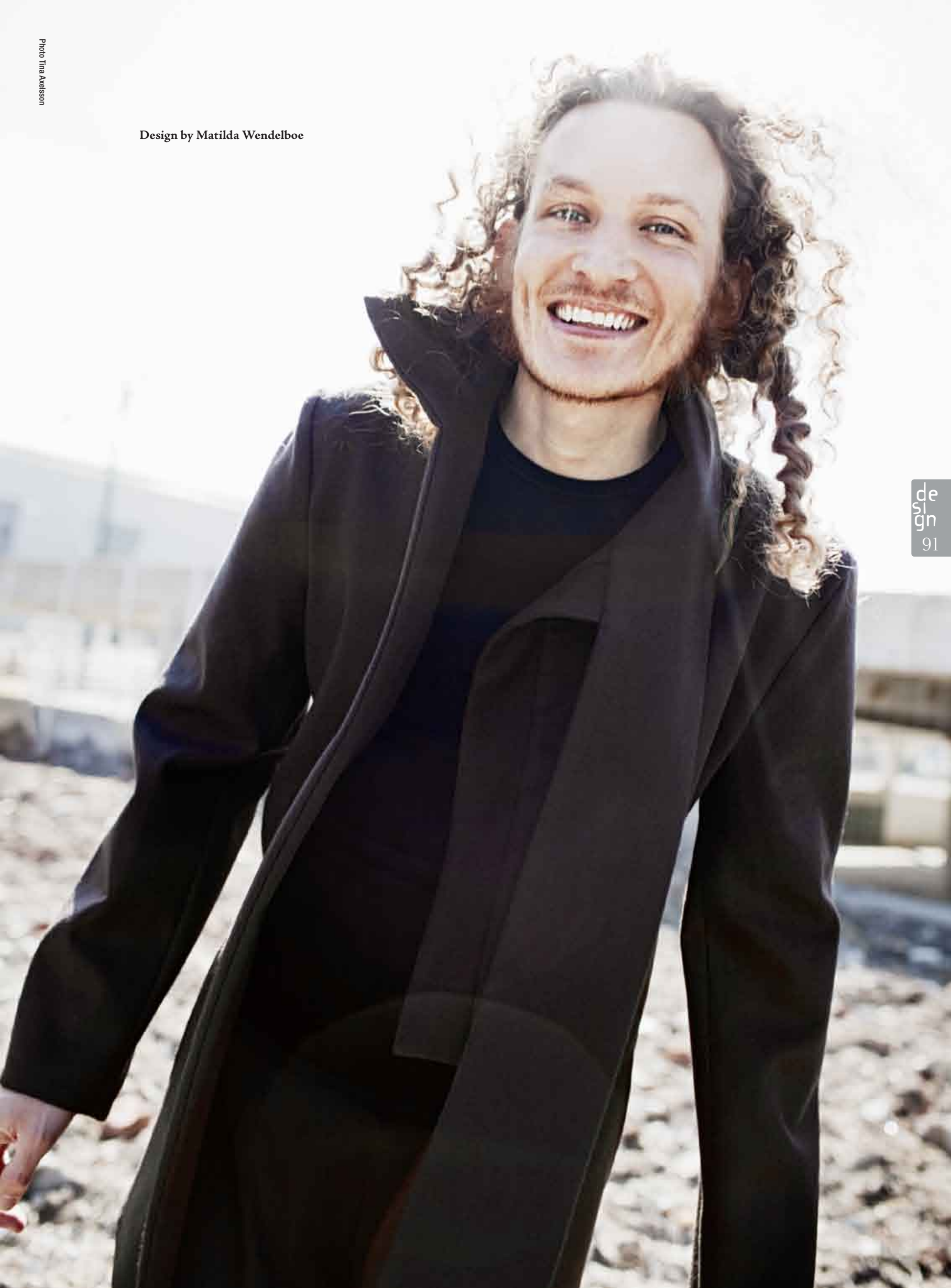
"The time is now for us to go beyond simply being 'less bad' and to lead the world in the invention and innovation of 'more good' with Cradle to Cradle products and a prosperous Cradle to Cradle economy. Together, we will inspire and transform the world." said Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger according to the press-release. A corresponding European institute is being planned, most likely to be situated in the Netherlands.

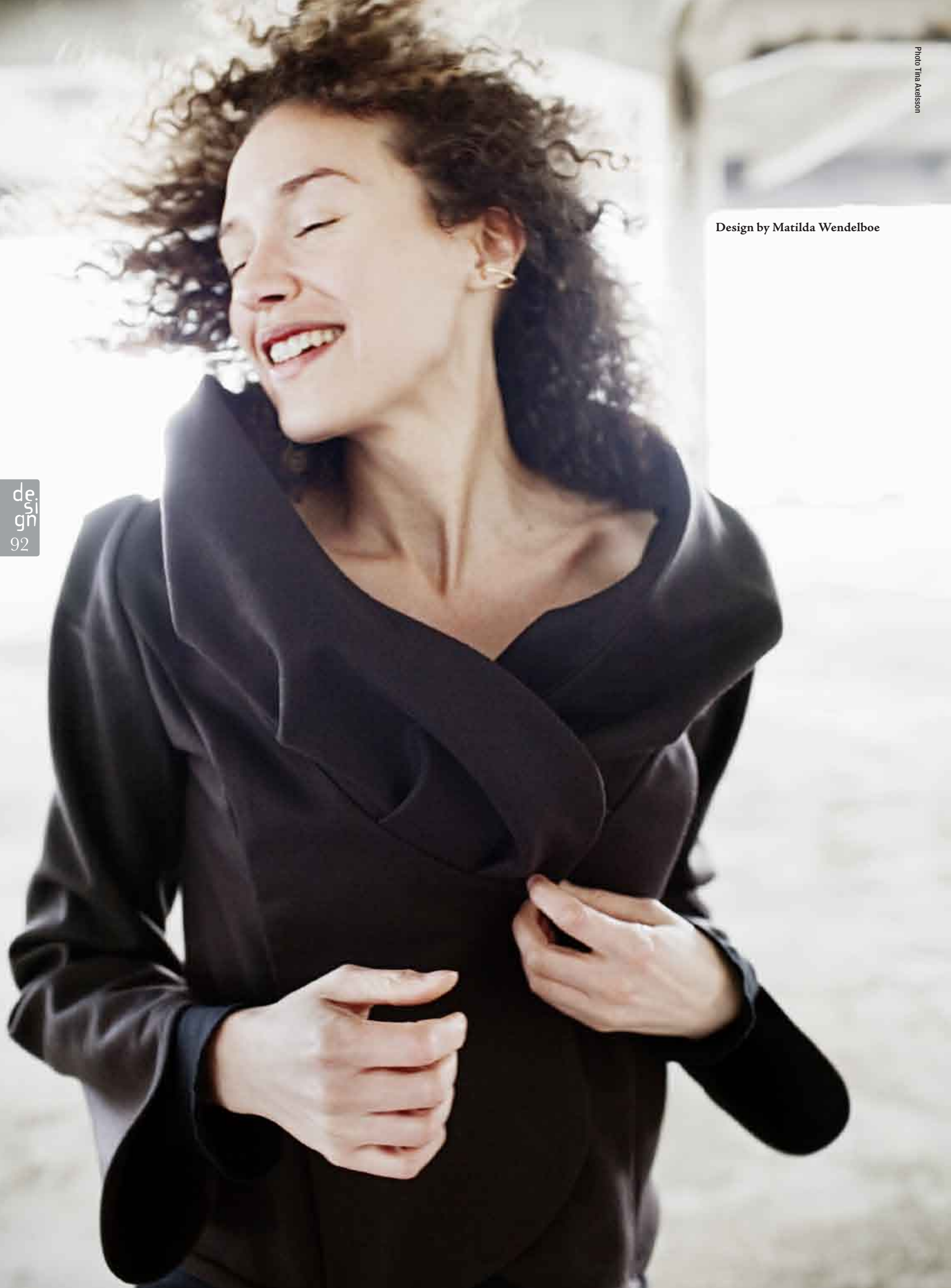
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Design by Matilda Wendelboe





Design by Matilda Wendelboe

And one year plus from Wiejers' prediction, Cradle to Cradle wins over eager young minds in Stockholm. One of them, Mattias Ohlson, a business-consultant in his thirties with offices by fancy Stureplan, states that "many companies and organisations in Sweden say they want to go Cradle to Cradle". His company, owned together with partner Per Löfberg, is characteristically called *Vagga till Vagga* (Cradle to Cradle in Swedish) and provides consultancy services for design strategy as well as material analysis. They also arrange seminars, workshops and master-classes within the Cradle to Cradle concept.

The attractiveness of C2C may very well be that it represents a discourse of optimism contrary to all the doom and gloom in environmentally aware circles, where mindsets revolve around reducing our ecological footprint and decreasing manufacturing due to ending resources. C2C is not about doing with less, it's about doing things differently. By doing things right from the start, considering the whole cycle of a product, using safely produced materials that are either compostable or eternally recyclable, there is no need to exploit ending resources. In a near future, India and China are no longer going to export their copper, for instance. They will have use for it themselves. It is up to us to use the copper *already* in circulation. And in order to do that, we must consider design principles that enable us to efficiently – and with less effort than today – gather up the valuable, precious and worthwhile metals that now cause environmental damage instead.

Annika Venge and Matilda Wendelboe are really one and the same. She responds to both names, her full name being Annika Matilda Wendelboe Venge. "But Matilda Wendelboe was long enough for my own label that has been around for three years now." Her glamorous, comfortable, every-day leisure yet luxurious-feel wear is mainly for women, but she also designs men's wear. Her clothing has been made in ecologically-manufactured materials and sewn in Sweden from the start. Now, she is one of three designers behind the world's first ever C2C fashion show.

Matilda is half-Danish, and she first heard about C2C from Danish designer Ole Palsby, who recommended that she read the book by McDonough & Braungart. "My response to the read was: *But of course! Waste is basically stupid!*"

Enthusiastically, she started to talk to others back in Sweden, and while aware of a bumpy road ahead, she is positive about C2C conceiving new beginnings: "I've been making ecological clothes for fifteen years and they were less bad than non-ecological clothing. According to the old ecological thinking, making things is basically bad, draining the world's resources. But with C2C I can hold my head high, abundance is not only allowed but ordained, and I can wake up happy in the morning." Matilda shows me the garments worn by the models at the Waste=Food fashion show. They are exceedingly attractive, each one of them displaying at least two different shapes of wear by changing arrangements and all with an exclusive, feminine touch.

"I want a revolution right now. A revolution where we adjust and rearrange production according to Cradle to Cradle principles. I care about

the actual product and beauty is a most important thing. And it's about a feeling. I want the person who wears my clothes to be complimented and admired, not the garment." Her idea of Cradlenet is a forum for spreading the C2C concept, interacting with other creative people and getting down to how to implement the ideas involved. "It is very difficult to think in new paths if you are entirely alone. I can stimulate interest and curiosity in other designers and manufacturers," she adds.

Johan Rutherhagen is a graphic designer and project leader who works with books, magazines and corporate identities. He was living in Denmark between 07 and 09, sharing offices with other freelancers where he came in contact with the Danish network Cradle People. Back in Stockholm, he contacted Vagga till Vagga and became a part of the group that formed Cradle Net and the C2C movement in Sweden.

"I am a proactive person. What motivates me is a drive to make a difference – in other and more creative ways than protesting. C2C is about design in a wider sense. In my job, there are many things to consider: anything from choosing what paper or material to print on, to think of intelligent ways to promote a product or company that doesn't necessarily mean producing short-lived printed matter. By implementing the C2C design paradigm I am actually taking part in a design revolution."

Johan is also involved in music, and contributed to the International Day of Climate Action last October by arranging an evening of 350 minutes of live music at Södra Teatern in Stockholm. Together with the artist Ane Brun he founded the project 'No More Lullabies'. "With the title we want to say that we can't be lulled anymore. It's late but not too late – to wake up and face the facts. And that is that we need to stop abusing our planet and instead be creative and compassionate" says Johan.

"Thinking about what we're doing to the world's ecological systems really makes you feel guilty, both as a member of society and as an individual. Guilt is a complicated feeling; it can give you angst, it can put you into a state of denial or passiveness. When people were listening to the 24 artists going up on stage one after another in that concert hall, they sort of looked at each other, realizing: Hey, we're all in the same boat here! I'm not the only one responsible and we're many that want to change. Music and art are efficient ways of getting through to people, reach the feelings, not just talk to the analytic brain."

Johan attended *Rework the World* in Leksand dressed in "Shizuoka", a compostable hoodie made by Matilda Wendelboe. The No More Lullabies project injected the summit with music.

Jeppe Dyberg Larsen and his wife Hanna are really touching the future. Not only do the young couple have small children, they also design C2C and eco-friendly clothes for babies and young children, their label being *Bonkeli Design – Cradle to Cradle – compostable clothes*. Their small firm has expanded with a rate of a hundred percent annually for the last two years. "Looking at ourselves and our personal beliefs and values there is no end to how important it is to have toxic-free clothes for children. Before



Compostable clothes by Bonkeli



Michael Braungart and Stef Kranendijk  
at the WASTE=FOOD fashion show.

we started making them, we had a hard time finding such clothes.” Now, the young couple sew up all the Bonkeli garments personally, although sometimes granny helps out: “There seems to be an endless demand. We have not done any marketing, yet we get inquiries all the time. As far as we know we are the only manufacturer of C2C clothing for children.”

Hanna previously designed and sewed women’s clothes for her own label, Bowler. “Most people buy many clothes for their babies, and are possibly not aware about the range of toxic chemicals involved in dyeing the fabrics. Our items may cost around 500 SEK, but on the other hand they are not harmful to the environment or the baby.”

Jeppé’s mother is Danish, and it was through her he got the book by Braungart & McDonough at a time when the climate-debate reached its peak: “I read it through in one go. I didn’t want to sleep, I experienced such a flow of energy from it. Now we can both make money and do the right thing! It was a revealing experience and I encouraged Hanna to read it right afterwards”. Hanna says: “Before, when we were cleaning out stores, I used to feel guilty about throwing away things. Which led to an inability to act rather than creativity. Now, I don’t feel that way. C2C is about so much more than just clothing. We can change the world for the better”

When they read the book, their son was a small baby and the thought of overpopulation was not a very encouraging one. “Now we are 7 billion on this planet and within a few years we’ll be 9 billion. How are we going to feed the world? There we were with our newborn, asking ourselves whether we should feel guilty about contributing to the overpopulation and draining of the world’s resources. Taking part in C2C meant we could relate to the problem in a more constructive way and realize it is possible to live the alternative. Suddenly, the whole issue became a ‘Mission Possible’. Like Michael Braungart says: We’re not too many, we’re too stupid! It’s all about doing things in a smarter way.” □

## What is Cradle to Cradle?

**Cradle to Cradle – or C2C for short – are the ideas and concepts described in the book *Cradle to Cradle – Remaking the Way We Make Things* by German Chemist Michael Braungart and American Architect William McDonough, first released in 2002. It is also a trade mark and a certification owned by MBDC (McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry). Cradle to Cradle is about using nature’s own processes as a model for production and it carries three fundamental principles: Waste=food, Sun as a source of energy, and Promote diversity.**

**The phrase Cradle to Cradle contrasts with Cradle to Grave – which is how we have been producing things ever since the Industrial Revolution: using natural resources to manufacture products that eventually become waste. The Cradle to Cradle phrase implies that things and materials can be used over and over again and that the C2C model is sustainable and considerate of life in general.**

**In the C2C world, materials are called either technical or biological nutrients. Technical nutrients – such as plastics – are manufactured by humans and can be used many times over without any loss in quality. Parts, for instance of a chair (Steelcase’s Think-chair) or a shoe (Nike’s Considered) can be used over and over again, thus staying within a continuous cycle. Biological nutrients are organic materials that will decompose in the natural environment without affecting it in any negative way. They are compostable, thus providing food for bacteria and microbiological life.**

**C2C terminology refers to what is conventionally known as recycling as ‘downcycling’, since current systems are wasteful cycles that deteriorate materials and reuse them in lesser products. The Waste=Food phrase expresses a pillar concept within C2C. Organic waste materials become food for bugs, insects and other small forms of life, which feed on it, decompose it and return it to the natural environment – thus indirectly providing food for ourselves. As a framework, Cradle to Cradle considers systems holistically. The model can be applied to many aspects of human activity and relates to Life Cycle Assessment (LCA).**

# Annons