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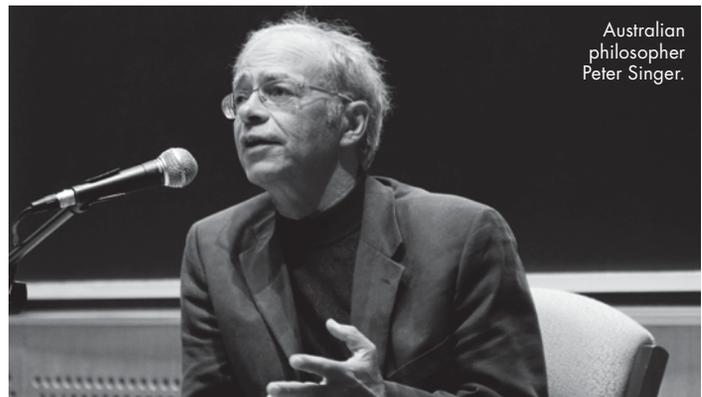
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# 10 WAYS TO LIVE CONSCIOUSLY

*Want to help improve the lives of others on this planet but don't know where to start? Here's how.*

BY SANJAY SURANA



Australian philosopher Peter Singer.

If you follow the media, the world might appear to be teetering on the brink, but for exponents of the modern-day movement known as conscious living, help is at hand. Followers of conscious living recognise that our lives and consumption have global repercussions, effects that we don't readily care to acknowledge. By choosing wisely, ethically, we can engender greater well-being in consumerism, sustainability, ecosystems, and human and animal welfare.

Conscious living is not simply about environmental stewardship, though it does embrace such awareness, but it is about admitting that in the 21st century, our way of life is linked to a farmer in Chile, a woodworker in India, a rhino in southern Africa, a forest in Laos, a single-mother business owner in Sembawang.

The Internet has been key to unearthing how interconnected we all are and showing how we individually have the power to make positive change. Just consider that the now-ubiquitous acronym CSR (corporate social responsibility) was largely unheard of a decade ago, showing how rapidly the conversation has tilted.

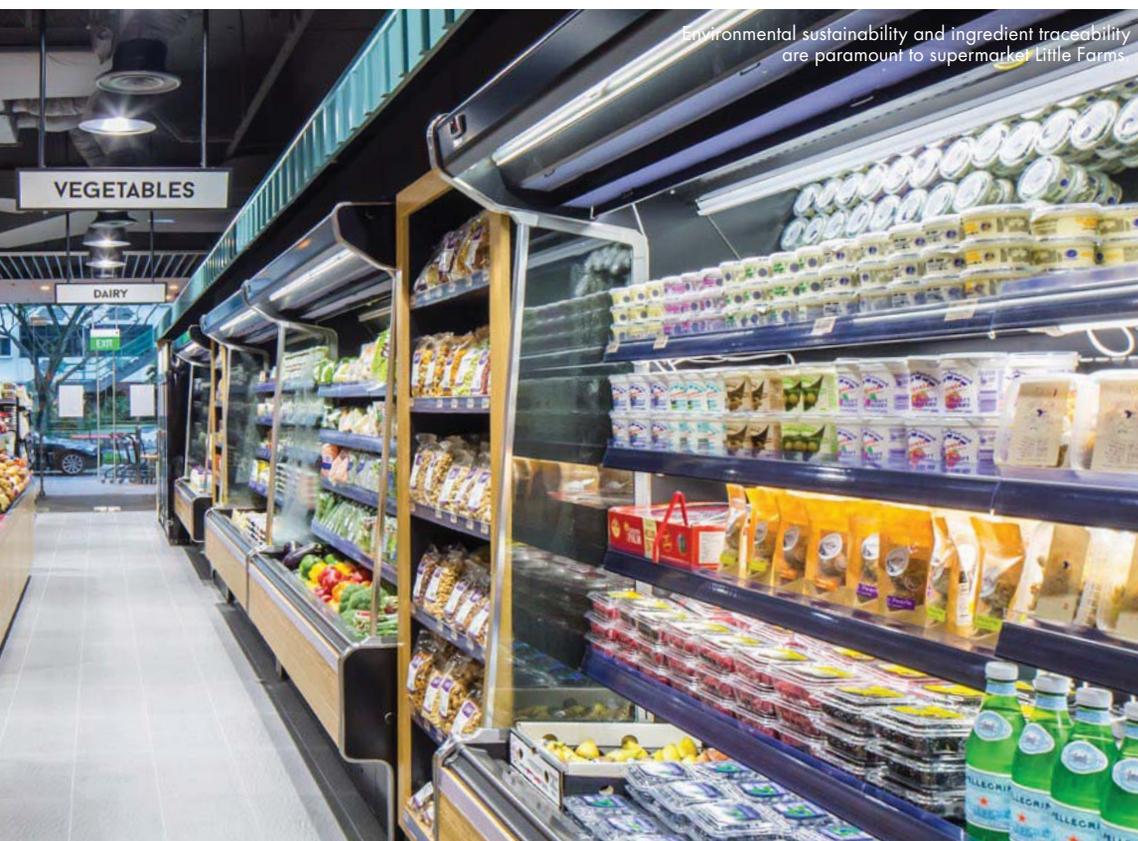
On 22 October, the full-day Singapore event Green is the New Black returns for its second iteration, and puts the spotlight on conscious living, aiming to inspire and educate attendees on the realities and rewards of such a lifestyle. In the meantime, the following pointers should help you to gauge where you fall on – or off – the conscious-living spectrum.

## 1. You donate carefully and not just for the tax write-off.

What's not to love about giving money to charities? As the Australian philosopher Peter Singer wrote in his remarkable treatise *The Most Good You Can Do*, "Effective altruism is based on a very simple idea: we should do the most good we can." Singer identifies meta-charities like 80,000 Hours, Giving What We Can Give, and The Life You Can Save – charities that evaluate and promote other charities, multiplying the impact of any donation. Consider them next time you're feeling generous.

## 2. You choose travel companies that give back.

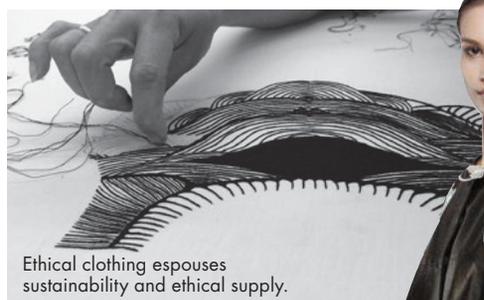
While any travel is educational, it's more rewarding to use operators and providers that contribute to local communities. Travellers on expeditions by Earthwatch help with valuable scientific research. The barefoot-luxe Indonesian resort Nihiwatu funnels all profits into the Sumba Foundation and its key local health, education, water and income-generation programmes. Planeterra, a partner of the adventure travel company G Adventures, funds numerous social projects in G Adventures destinations. Singapore-based Como Hotels marks its 25th anniversary this November with a "25 Hours of Service" initiative among its staff. "This challenge resonates with our employees to use their initiative, creativity, and passion to support local causes," says Ming Tan, Executive Director of the Como Foundation.



Environmental sustainability and ingredient traceability are paramount to supermarket Little Farms

#### 4. You mostly cook your own food; when you eat out, you're mindful of where you go.

People who eat at home consume fewer calories (and less salt, sugar and fat than those who eat out). Environmentally, home-cooking produces less food waste and gives individuals the power to source their ingredients from local producers, reducing transportation costs. Singaporeans can direct-purchase at the second Singapore Farm Festival (29-30 October). Alternatively, Little Farms supermarket supplies responsibly sourced products. "We are proponents of sustainable and ethical farming and sourcing practices. Our farmers and suppliers are guided by the principals of environmental sustainability and ingredient traceability," says Nick Barnett, Little Farms' chief marketing officer. Grain Traders, a welcoming space in the financial district, follows a simple ethos, eschewing frozen or processed products, and cooking in small batches as people would at home.



Ethical clothing espouses sustainability and ethical supply.

#### 3. You favour ethically sourced clothing and footwear.

Visions of derelict sweatshops crammed with underage workers have long plagued the fashion business, but clothing companies are rapidly re-evaluating their business practices. Ethical clothing doesn't mean tattered dungarees and pilly tartan shirts – brands such as Monsoon, New Balance, Stella McCartney, Patagonia and Edun (founded by Ali Hewson and her husband Bono – yes, that Bono) espouse sustainability and ethical supply. Lanvy Nguyen, founder of Fashion4Freedom, is passionate about responsible fashion. "I created Fashion4Freedom because artisans and marginalised producers need access to markets, and more emerging designers and small labels need access to fair production while addressing the preservation issues of heritage methods of handmade products in Vietnam."



Every year, Swedish furniture giant Ikea publishes a sustainability report.

#### 5. You are clued up on sustainable logging, VOCs and soy-based adhesives.

Wide-scale deforestation and toxic chemicals used in the furniture-building process are just two issues dogging the industry. British-based Myakka uses sustainable hardwood and employs Fair Trade practices for its affordable Indian-built furniture. The Swedish giant Ikea publishes a sustainability report each year. "As Ikea's business grows, so do the efforts to devise new solutions that will lead to a more sustainable way of doing business," says Hui Mien, Head of Sustainability, Ikea Southeast Asia. "There is an expectation for companies to be responsible and ensure that their business practices and/or products do not negatively impact people and environment."



Carolyn Tate, founder of the Slow School of Business based in Melbourne, Australia.

**6. You seek active change.**

In Singapore, the Change School offers learning experiences to people who want to transform their lives and understand the connection to the world around them. In Australia, Carolyn Tate founded the Slow School of Business to help students start purpose-driven and prosperous businesses that enrich the world. “I started Slow School because we need an antidote to the fast-profit, short-term thinking that dominates capitalism and business,” she says. “We need a new model of regenerative capitalism, one where we are all prosperous, not just the few at the top.”



An Uplifted Boutique offers carefully curated, natural products.



Yap Shan Shan

**7. You use products including skincare that aren't tested on living creatures.**

Yap Shan Shan launched the online wellness and lifestyle boutique An Uplifted Day in July this year, with carefully curated, natural products aimed at helping women have a better day.

**What are the most common excuses people make to defend not living consciously?**

**Yap Shan Shan:** All excuses are rooted in the misbelief that people don't believe they can do it. Every little step you take to practice consciousness counts.

**How can one improve in living consciously?**

**YSS:** I am working on eating more consciously. It is not about eating all organic food but being aware

of what I put into my body, only eating when I am hungry and stopping as soon as I've had enough.

**If you knew that the supplies of everything on the planet were inexhaustible, would you still live consciously?**

**YSS:** It's even more important to practice conscious living if we could have everything without consequences because there would be nothing to remind us to stay conscious.

**Is it possible for one to live 100% consciously?**

**YSS:** We should try as much as we can. It's not about how much you're doing but more about being aware of how and why you do the things you do.

**Do you think people live consciously to feel good about themselves, to show off to their peers, or because they truly want to make a difference?**

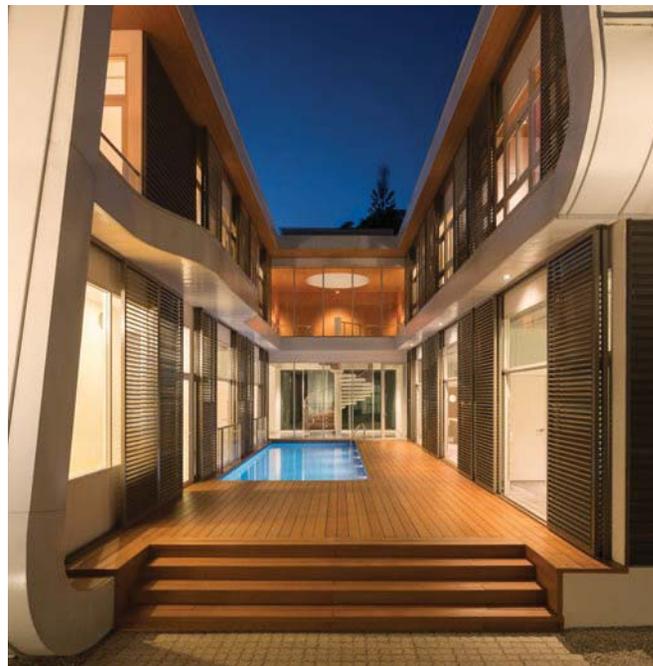
**YSS:** Does it matter why a person begins his or her path of conscious living? I think the end justifies the initial intention, whatever that may be. As long as the practice of conscious living positively transforms the person into a more aware, open, accepting individual over time, it doesn't matter why he or she started.

**8. You choose used or refurbished electronics.**

There is no such thing as ethical electronics, and most gadgets that we slavishly wield house controversially sourced materials. Cobalt, used in rechargeable batteries, exposes miners (sometimes child labourers) to heavy metals through dust inhalation. Processing of rare earth, used for smartphone displays, often produces toxic sludge that seeps into groundwater. The more conscious choice is to purchase second-hand or refurbished electronics, reducing the need for new products. Australia's Ethical Consumer Group has a Shop Ethical app that ranks companies, including electronics manufacturers, on their virtues. “In the world of extremely complex supply chains, there are no simple ‘ethical’ companies, but rather companies that are ‘more’ ethical or ‘less’ ethical,” declares Nick Ray, co-founder of the Ethical Consumer Group. “Our ratings are intended as a starting point to allow people to make comparisons of products based on the environmental and social track-record of these companies.”



B House, a green building in Bukit Timah by architect Jason Pomeroy.



### 9. You're conversant with the terms Leed, energy audit, living roof and solar walls.

Green building is increasingly sought-after, and Singapore-based architect Jason Pomeroy made headlines earlier this year with the unveiling of B House in Bukit Timah. "It's a pioneering operational carbon-negative home that generates more green power than it consumes, yet costs the same as similar properties in the area," notes Pomeroy. "I feel I have responsibility and an opportunity to improve the lives for ourselves and future generations by creating built environments that are not only 'liveable and loveable', but are also good for the environment."

Green is the New Black is a festival that features talks, workshops and a marketplace for proponents of conscious living.



Stephanie Dickson, organiser of conscious festival Green is the New Black.



### 10. You'd like to learn more, but don't know where to start.

Green is the New Black, the brainchild of marketer and event organiser Stephanie Dickson, takes place at the Hotel Jen on 22 October. This one-day cornucopia, which Dickson describes as a "conscious festival for truth seekers wanting to improve the way they live, work and consume while doing more good in the world", features talks by leaders and proponents in the field, hands-on workshops, a marketplace chock-full of conscious companies, and live entertainment.

#### How would you define conscious living?

**Stephanie Dickson:** Taking control of your life, by opening your eyes and being aware of your decisions, how they impact you, your surroundings and the environment.

#### How easy is it to live consciously?

**SD:** It is easier than ever. We have all of the information at our fingertips [thank you Google], and also incredibly innovative people championing better living. You can download free meditation apps like The Wellness Report here in Singapore. You can swap clothes at one of Connected Threads Asia's clothes swaps. You can get healthy and hearty meals from the likes of DoSiRak or Salad Stop.

#### What are the most common excuses people make to defend not living consciously?

**SD:** The three Cs: Cost, convenience and communication.

People think they have to go out of their way to live consciously. There are so many easy things people can do, some of which I have already mentioned. We have an issue with the haze each year. Everyone complains, yet how many people would actually look up which products and brands are causing this? As corny as it sounds, every bit counts and we are empowered to change ourselves and change our impact.

#### What aspects of your old life do you miss?

**SD:** I have never thought about it as "my old life" and "my new life". It has been an evolution with a continual series of conscious choices to live better. There isn't anything that I miss, as I am happier and healthier now than ever before.

#### How can you espouse conscious living in a world where, according to some estimates, 80% of humans live on less than \$10 a day?

**SD:** It doesn't have to be an expensive way of life. For the mind, there is so much free, life-changing content on the Internet. For the body, we can cheaply make our own natural skin products and cook at home instead of eating fast food. For the planet, swap clothes and items with other people instead of buying new. Consume less and recycle. There are incredible innovators. Take GTL World's all-purposes green formula – it can remove the toxins off your fruit and veggies, clean all your surfaces and be used to wash your clothes! It costs \$35 for one litre of concentrate and mine has lasted a year.