



FASHION

Back to Basics

In a turbulent world, we're always in a rush — while craving comfort and stability.

Dublin-based fashion designer Katie Bedwell '02 O'Riordan set out to answer that need with Theo + George, a capsule collection of forever wear for women. "You could've worn these pieces 20 years ago and will be able to 20 years from now," she says. "They're not going anywhere."

O'Riordan aims to create slow fashion so consumers buy less rather than fill their closets with fast fashions that wind up discarded. Ninety-two million tons of garments are pitched yearly — equal to a garbage truck crammed with clothes dumping into a landfill every second, reports Earth.org.

"That's an insane amount of waste," O'Riordan says.

At Theo + George, "I'm never over-

producing. I'd rather items sell out."

While growing up in Philadelphia, O'Riordan learned from her mother and grandmother to sew, knit, and crochet — and not buy things on a whim.

O'Riordan was also a sports enthusiast, and at age 13, declared to her father she'd work for Burton snowboard company. The civil engineer laughed and said, "Get a degree and then we'll talk about it."

After the Colgate physics major graduated, she briefly worked at an architectural firm and STX, a lacrosse and hockey stick maker.

In 2006, she achieved her childhood dream, managing Burton's special projects and later its global outerwear line. She also helped design the 2010 U.S. Olympic snowboarding team uniforms.

She met husband John, a Dublin-based

solicitor, while attending the 2009 wedding of Lauren Moore '02 Roche-Garland. O'Riordan and he maintained a long-distance relationship while she worked for Burton. She moved to Dublin in 2011, and they married the next year.

Her Colgate minor in economics has come in handy since she went solo. "Fashion is a business, and you've got to make it profitable and sustainable through good times and bad."

So O'Riordan was prepared when she launched her Irish-produced Theo + George line of printed silk party dresses in 2013. "It was intended to be a small project to give me flexibility to have a family."

In 2017 she pivoted to classic clothes made of certified organic cotton, cashmere, and denim — all in small batches.

O'Riordan had correctly tapped the pulse of her target market — women 25-40 — while answering her own needs. By then O'Riordan was a mother of two (later three) and craved high-quality yet affordable everyday wear. She also recognized that consumers were falling out of love with fast fashion and in love with sustainability.

So she went with basics, creating T-shirts, sweaters, and jeans, with occasional skirts, dresses, and bomber jackets. "It's the place to go for staples that aren't going to disappear with the season."

In addition to a Breton stripe, Theo + George offers solid neutrals such as black, navy, charcoal, camel, and ivory, with occasional injections of rust, baby blue, or ballet pink. O'Riordan adds approximately five new pieces yearly and introduces new shades to existing items.

Her line has grown 200% in sales from year to year and sold to over 60 countries last year.

A bestseller since the start is the Alannah, an ultra-soft, diamond-quilted suede bomber purposefully made in limited numbers, like all her offerings. It's named for her niece.

"She just turned 15 and asked for the bomber for her birthday," O'Riordan says. "That made me so proud."

Beyond Theo + George, she's developing Kinset, a cutting-edge, green technology providing digital passports of supply chain journeys for apparel and footwear. Tags will bring transparency and accountability, empowering consumers to make informed decisions and encouraging brands to produce sustainably.

"I'm a doer, not just a dreamer," O'Riordan says. "My husband says, 'Watch out when Katie gets a notion. It's going to happen.'"

— Michele Meyer