

Towards ESG journey with GINLEE Studio and Sage & Ylang

Part 2 of 2



INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

Local brands on their ESG journey

GINLEE Studio and Sage & Ylang

As the global fashion industry goes through a sustainability makeover, [Singapore Fashion Council \(SFC\)](#) is featuring different local firms that are moving towards environmental, social and governance (ESG) goals.

SFC's [inaugural sector report](#) released in 2022, found that in Singapore alone, the fashion industry would need to halve its emissions by 2030 to align with the Paris Agreement's goal of keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Previously in our [first Industry Insights article](#), we interviewed local fashion suppliers, [Ghim Li Group](#) and [TEO Garments](#), on their ESG credentials and initiatives. In this second series, we interview 2 local brands, GINLEE Studio, and Sage & Ylang, on their current ESG journey to date.

[GINLEE Studio](#) designs, develops, manufactures and retails womenswear in Singapore, and has wholesale channels in Israel and South Korea.

[Sage & Ylang](#), a skincare brand, innovates and manufactures its sustainable products locally and markets them globally through an e-commerce platform, and spas and clinics locally and abroad.

In the interviews below, they shared with SFC how they achieved key milestones to kickstart their ESG initiatives and their ESG journey so far.

Why is sustainability important to your company?

Ms Gin Lee (GL), Co-Founder, GINLEE Studio: Every garment that is made has an impact on both the wearer and the environment. While we take great pride in making clothes that women feel beautiful in, we strongly believe it should not be at the environment's expense. We must start changing things and making things more sustainably.

Ms Irene Chong (IC), Founder, Sage & Ylang: Our innate desire to be responsible stewards of the planet motivated us to create and design skincare formulations with green ingredient alternatives, select recyclable packaging and adopt sustainable manufacturing processes. Our commitment to providing high-quality, safe and sustainable skincare solutions sets us apart in the industry too.

Can you tell me more about your sustainability journey to date?

GL: We have a UNWAKE IN SHOP project that modernises the age-old craft pleating and is the antithesis of the modern model of mass, ready-made fast fashion. The project is currently running with smaller accessories such as bags, scarves and tops. Customers come to our shop and have their choice of styles and colours, and then we complete the entire process of pleating and steaming in-store to create their product in a relatively short time.



Left to Right: Processes of UNWAKE by GINLEE Studio that includes pleating and steaming of the pleated product.
Images by GINLEE Studio.

This addresses the widespread issue of over-manufacturing and excess stock in our industry, with fashion becoming faster and cheaper to encourage consumerism, and mass production at huge quantities to keep prices down and profits up. This generates so much waste. Besides, with online shopping challenging the need for physical stores, retailers need to give shoppers a reason to visit brick-and-mortar stores. Our project does that for our store.

IC: When we established Sage & Ylang, we didn't have a team of sustainability experts. Still, we committed to sustainability in 6 key areas: design and formulation, ingredient choices and sourcing, manufacturing, packaging, educating consumers on sustainability so that they can make more informed choices, and giving back to the community.

These commitments have come with some challenges. For example, limiting our ingredient choices to those with greener chemistry, such as biodegradable and non-petroleum-derived options, has made our product development more complex. Still, we remain steadfast in our dedication to creating effective and environmentally responsible skincare products.

What are some of your company's ESG achievements so far, and what are you working towards? Why are these important?

GL: We have received grants for our sustainability initiatives. These include the DesignSingapore Council's Good Design Research Grant, under its sustainable systems and processes track, and a grant from the Singapore Tourism Board's Experience Step-Up Fund.

Both grants are awarded to companies that have more to offer in terms of our nation-wide sustainability and other forms of social improvement goals, such as initiatives that improve social cohesion, find new uses for waste or produce greener materials. Getting the grants help to reinforce that we are moving in the right direction.

IC: We recently took part in the Chemical Footprint Survey. It evaluates responders' chemicals management systems against best practices to help them measure and reduce their chemical footprints. We were recognised as one of the front-runners globally in proactive chemical management.



Weight reduction on Bottle A and B's outer packaging.
Images by Sage & Ylang.

We are also a member of the [Packaging Partnership Programme](#) due to our commitment to reducing our use of outer packaging. These initiatives are important for us to stay true to our 6 sustainable practices - design and formulation, ingredient choices and sourcing, manufacturing, packaging, educating consumers. Furthermore, they affirm our commitment, which is important for consumers who want to ensure that they are choosing sustainable skincare products.

What are your sustainability plans moving forward?

GL: We are about to launch a new project aimed at promoting a circular business model. We will be offering services such as repair and re-pleating, and products that have been upcycled and redesigned. The intention is to keep items that have been produced in the loop as much as possible.



GINLEE Studio's [un/wake](#) experience. Image by GINLEE Studio.

IC: We recognise that there's still more work to be done under each of our 6 core sustainable practices. We will take part in the Chemical Footprint Survey this year again, continue to collaborate with the Packaging Partnership Programme to learn best practices in packaging and packaging waste management, such as how to reuse or recycle our packaging, and keep doing our part to educate consumers about skincare ingredients.

What advice would you give to other companies in the fashion and beauty industry that want to be more sustainable?

GL: You can use design as a tool, and design for waste reduction and circularity. Other than that, look internally and see what your potential strengths in sustainability are, and where you can contribute the most.

IC: Commitment to sustainability must start from within the firm. You can begin by conducting a sustainability audit to identify areas for improvement, reducing packaging, choosing greener materials, and educating your customers on sustainability.

Why is it important for your industry to become more sustainable?

GL: We have only one Earth, so it's crucial for everyone to be aware of their environmental footprint and take steps to shrink it.

IC: In my opinion, there is a general lack of emphasis when it comes to the skincare industry and its effort toward sustainability. We hope to start the ball rolling and inspire other skincare brands to join the sustainability journey and support each other in this. It needs to be a group effort, with every brand being responsible and contributing toward a more sustainable future.

It is crucial for local companies, big or small, to be sustainable and ensure their long-term success and contribute to a more sustainable future for everyone. Adopting ESG practices can help companies achieve long-term sustainability by balancing economic, social, and environmental considerations. This can lead to more resilient and successful businesses contributing to a more sustainable future.