



QUANG AND ELLIE DINH

The Girlfriend Collective founders give used water bottles a workout.

TEN THOUSAND—that’s how many orders Ellie and Quang Dinh received the day their activewear brand, Girlfriend Collective, soft-launched last April. They offered one item: high-waisted black leggings made from recycled water bottles, about 25 per pair. Think big-name sportswear fit and style but without sheer-ness and at a lower price. “We want to make clothes that not only support a better world but encourage women who care about the world to support each other,” says Ellie. When the full line launches next month, the Seattle-based company will have diverted almost 7 million used water bottles from landfills. To become fabric, the bottles are washed, sorted by color, shredded, rewashed and sent to a yarn mill for weaving. The result not only looks good but is lightweight, soft and supportive. And while the Dinhs have kept costs down, that’s not the conversation they want to have. “We want people to stop asking how much sustainable fashion costs and start asking how much our world is worth,” says Ellie. —HANNAH LOTT-SCHWARTZ



- ▶ **Reusing** plastic bottles in clothing is an old trick for outdoor retailers. The first to adopt the process was Patagonia, which started turning the bottles into polyester in 1993.
- ▶ **It takes** at least 450 years (or 18 generations) for plastic bottles to biodegrade, meaning that virtually every one ever made still exists today.
- ▶ **Americans** drink about 50 billion bottles of water every year but recycle only 23 percent of that.

SPIN THE PLASTIC BOTTLE

Rethinking what’s possible with plastic in Panama, the Czech Republic and New York.



1 In Bocas del Toro, Panama, an ecoresidential community called **Plastic Bottle Village** uses its namesake for building insulation.



2 Czech artist **Veronika Richterová** turns plastic bottles into playful critters, flora and more in exhibitions around the world.



3 A wall made of plastic bottles filled with mineral water and LED lights lends a chic, calming glow to **Morimoto** restaurant in NYC.