

PROFILES



Meet the Woman Who's Making Disposable Products Obsolete

by Sheri Radford / Nov 22, 2021

Isabel Agaard is tackling the problem of single-use products, one cotton swab and facial tissue at a time

The disposable cotton swab might not seem like a crucial environmental problem to tackle, not when the polar ice caps are melting and the Amazon Rainforest is disappearing at an alarming rate. But every day, [1.5 million disposable swabs are produced](#). Enormous amounts of land, water and fossil fuels are used to grow the cotton, produce the plastic and transport the finished products, then many of the swabs end up [polluting the ocean](#). (Perhaps you've seen the [heartbreaking photo of the seahorse](#) holding a cotton swab with its tail.)

In July 2021, the [European Union's long-awaited ban on single-use plastics](#) finally took effect. The list of 10 banned items includes plastic straws, cutlery, plates, sticks for balloons—and cotton swabs.

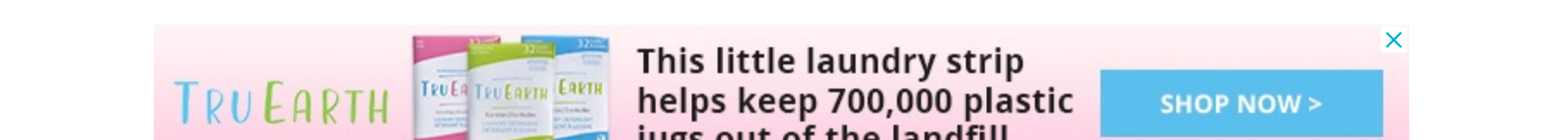
[LastObject](#) has the goal of creating sustainable alternatives to common disposable items such as the 10 on the EU's list. Isabel Agaard founded this innovative company in Copenhagen with her brother, Nicolas Agaard, and Kåre Frandsen.

"We wanted to do something that had a massive impact, something where we could move mountains, and this is why we tackled the single-use industry," Isabel says. "This is just one of the industries that you don't really recognize in your daily life as a consumer how many of these products you actually use. But this is a trillion-dollar industry."

The first product that came together for the team was [LastSwab](#), a reusable alternative to the cotton swab. "We nailed that design so quickly," Isabel says. "It was perfect." She adds with a laugh, "I think we designed the box longer than we actually designed the swab."



She initially learned about design at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation in Copenhagen, then perfected her skills while working on various design projects for hospitals.



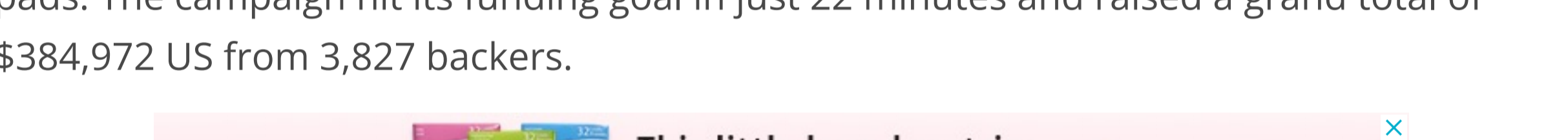
LastSwab launched in 2019 after successful crowdfunding campaigns on Kickstarter and Indiegogo that raised more than \$1.3 million US. Made from recycled ocean-bound plastic, this sustainable swab can be cleaned easily using either soap and water or a disinfectant such as rubbing alcohol. It's available in three versions, each with a slightly different shape: Basic, Beauty and Baby. And the best part? Each LastSwab replaces 1,000 disposable cotton swabs.

LastObject has launched other successful products since then. [LastRound](#) reusable makeup remover pads are made from a combination of wood fibres and cotton fibres that are too short to be used in textiles, and after about 250 uses they can go in the compost bin. A set of seven pads is stored in a case made from either recycled ocean-bound plastic or a plant-based material.

[LastTissue](#) replaces disposable facial tissues. Made from organic cotton, these handkerchiefs come in either an on-the-go case that holds six or a larger version, LastTissue Box, that holds 18. Both sizes of the extremely clever silicone case are designed to keep the clean tissues separated from the soiled ones.



In September, LastObject ran a [Kickstarter campaign for LastPad](#) reusable menstrual pads. The campaign hit its funding goal in just 22 minutes and raised a grand total of \$384,972 US from 3,827 backers.



The typical menstruator uses between 11,000 and 16,000 disposable menstrual products in her lifetime, and a single-use pad takes about 500 years to break down in landfill. In contrast, each LastPad can be used at least 240 times. It has a breathable top layer made from antibacterial polyester, a middle layer made from absorbent polyester and an absorbent bamboo blend, and a leak-proof bottom layer that contains fast-wicking bamboo charcoal. Protection wings and sticky silicone strips keep the pad in place, and a small pouch makes storage easy and mess-free.

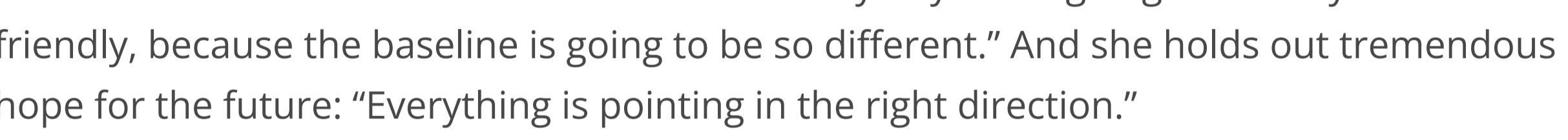
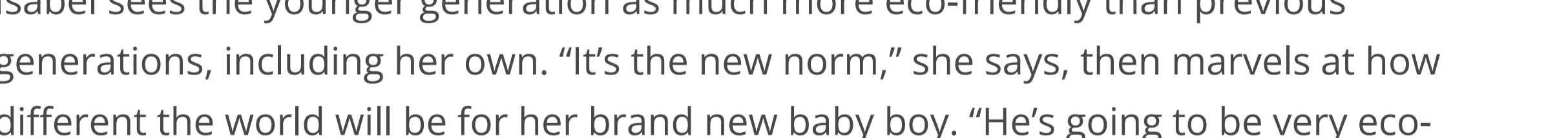


Isabel admits that it took a long time to perfect the LastPad design. "We've been working on LastPad for almost three years, and we've launched six products since. Some things just click," she says. "I'm constantly working on about six products at a time."

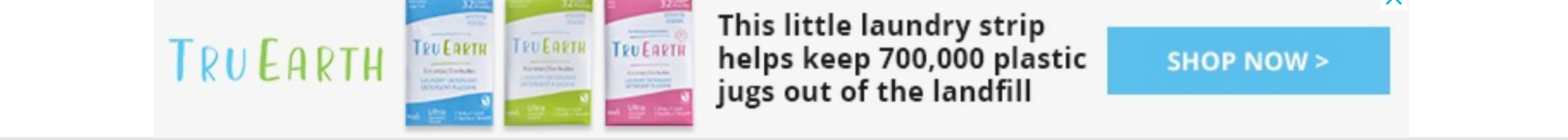
Though her goal is to eliminate all single-use products, Isabel doesn't expect anyone to go zero-waste overnight. As an example, she cites her own personal struggle with coffee cups. "I was shocked at how many disposable coffee cups I actually used throughout a week," she says, and it took her a while to break the habit after she noticed it. First she had to find the perfect reusable mug for her car, and a different one that would work on her bike. Then she had to actually remember to bring one with her. "But when I got the right rhythm, then it was easy," she says. Her advice for anyone wanting to replace wasteful habits with eco-friendly ones? "Take one thing at a time and do it for a month."

Other eco-friendly activities, such as biking or using old pickle jars instead of drinking glasses, have long been second nature to Isabel. But before launching LastObject, she hadn't spent much time thinking about the bigger picture of these types of environmental actions. She says, "I would say I've always been sustainable, but understanding sustainability? That has come in the last few years."

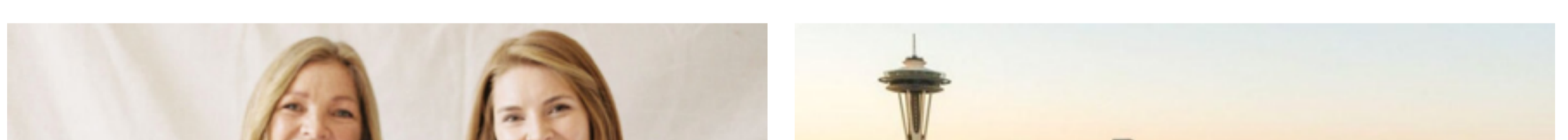
Isabel sees the younger generation as much more eco-friendly than previous generations, including her own. "It's the new norm," she says, then marvels at how different the world will be for her brand new baby boy. "He's going to be very eco-friendly, because the baseline is going to be so different." And she holds out tremendous hope for the future: "Everything is pointing in the right direction."



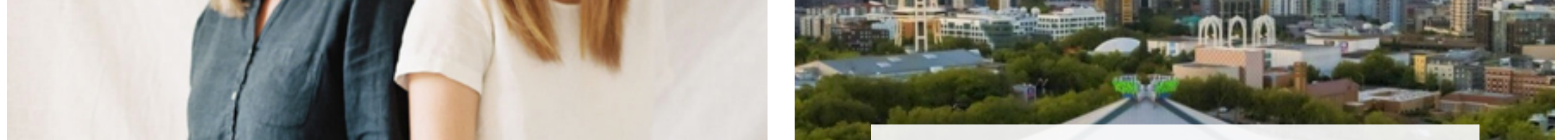
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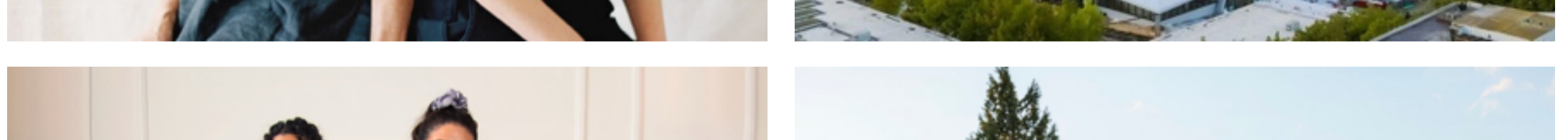
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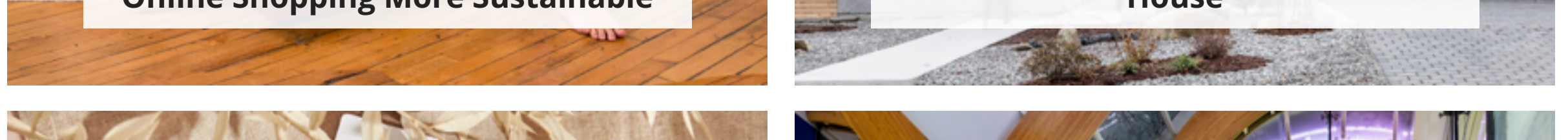
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