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September 21st, 2007 by [kath_red](#)

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Since 2005, Swap-O-Rama-Ramas have popped up in more than 50 cities and 5 countries, from Whitehorse, Yukon to Paris, France. If one hasn't happened in your hometown, there's likely to be one soon – and if there isn't one in the works, you're welcome to organize one yourself! The community clothing swap turned DIY wardrobe re-fashioning event has become a global phenomenon, turning consumers into creators with one fun-filled afternoon after another.



Swap-O-Rama-Rama is shared through a Creative Commons license and to be able to use the name, event organizers must promise to include a few essential elements. (Lots of sewing and DIY stations, no mirrors, nothing for sale. A modest entry fee and a bag of clothes get a participant in the door.) Other than these common components, the SORRs are free to reflect the character of each community – from a cosy rural sewing bee to a large urban party with DJs and performance art.

[Swap-o-rama-rama](#) (SORR) began two years ago when founder Wendy Tremayne moved the clothing swaps she'd been having in her apartment to a community hall in Brooklyn. Over 500 people showed up, and did more than just trade clothes – they learned to silkscreen, sew, make jewelry, alter and re-design their new-found duds into something truly their own.



More than recycling (each SORR saves hundreds of pounds of clothing from landfill), the event emphasizes stepping back from habitual consumerism and gives participants the opportunity to experience the joy of making. As Wendy says, “There is no creativity in consumerism. Consumers are largely asked to express themselves by being selectors. Makers don't make good consumers. The more you know, the more you can make, the less you're going to buy.”

It can be hard not to be overwhelmed by the temptations of the giant pile of clothes, but Wendy has seen that sooner or later

people realize there will always be more. “And not only that, once a person has had the experience of making their own clothes, it changes how they look at the wider world. They start to be aware of how many pesticides are used in growing cotton, and how so much clothing sold in the West is made by people in third world factories being paid a few cents a day.”



And the outfit a person creates at a Swap-O-Rama-Rama stays in their wardrobe a lot longer too. As Wendy notes: “No one’s kicking to the curb that garment that they spent the whole day having the greatest time making with five of their friends...That’s not going in the trash – that’s hanging around for a good long time.”

Making friends and community building is an aspect of SORR that evolves naturally. The events draw upon the talents of each community. Local reuse designers and artists staff the sewing and workstations. And remember the no mirrors rule? Odd as that might sound, think of how you will know how that fab pink shearling coat you just found looks on you without a mirror – well, you’ll have to ask the person next to you. Before you know it, you’ll be part of a team of personal wardrobe consultants, and by the end of the day may have met many new friends with a shared passion for making stuff. Wendy’s commitment to re-use has led her to a new project – building an eco resort and retreat centre in New Mexico, using retired shipping containers and papercrete (a mixture of cement and used newspaper) to create the adobe-like structures.

Green Acre has given her a new focus, and she is now sharing Swap-O-Rama-Rama duties with Vancouver artist Heather Cameron. The pair is organizing a SORR as part of Maker Faire in Austin TX this October 20 and 21. To take part, or for more information on starting a SORR in your hometown, visit swaporamarama.org

This entry was posted on Friday, September 21st, 2007 at 3:02 pm and is filed under [eco + recycling](#), [creativity + community](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

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