



MADE *in* CANADA

*The coolest designers behind
fashion's biggest brands.*
By SHIRINE SAAD

THE SPRING RUNWAY shows have wrapped up, and designers' names—from the up-and-comers to the super-heavyweights—are on everyone's lips. But nobody wears all designer, all the time, which got us wondering who's behind the faster fashion at the local mall. There's an army of undercover style savants dreaming up the affordable pieces most of us wear every day, so we talked to three designers from some of Canada's favourite fashion companies to see what makes them tick. »

RUDSAK FALL 2008

Aldo

COLLEEN BRADISH, A bubbly twentysomething designer at Aldo, certainly knows what her customers want. When she started working at a Los Angeles Aldo store in 2001, she chatted with all the girls who came in, and watched them try on, buy and sometimes return the new shoes. She got to know the shopping addicts who showed up every week looking for the latest pump, and came to understand that the international trends did not always translate into best-selling designs. “We really take more information from the street, from real people, from Hollywood, and we cater to the customers,” she explains.

When her talent for interpreting trends was spotted, she was offered the opportunity to move to Montreal from California to be part of the design team, even without a formal design background.

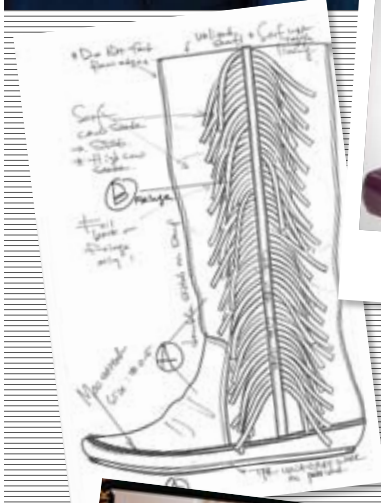
When Bradish is designing, it certainly helps that she is just like the typical Aldo client—she wants to play with fashion and be comfortable, but won’t spend \$900 on a pair of shoes. Today, she’s wearing a blue tie-dyed dress and Western-style suede boots. With her thick bangs and cascade of wavy brunette hair, she looks like a sexy ’70s cowgirl. When we visit, in the summer of 2008, she’s already working on the spring collections for 2009 and has just finished winter pro-

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duction, checking samples from the factories and sending them back with her changes.

In a fast-moving world, Aldo’s formula is ideal: Add the right pair of studded stilettos to your black uniform and you’re on-trend. “Now, a lot of the girls are building their outfits on their shoes,” explains Bradish. “And a lot of the shoes that we’re successful with are statement shoes. Every designer has an It shoe, and these set the mood for your look.”

We wander through Aldo’s beautifully modern design offices in Montreal. The walls are covered with mood boards and endless leather samples. Bradish explains that she always starts her design process by analyzing the market and getting ideas at trade shows. For this winter, the team decided on three main themes: a rocker look (black leather with a lot of hardware), a softer Western look with leather and suede in warm tones, and an androgynous style with a vintage touch. In the huge showroom, where the season’s shoes are displayed, she shows me her favourite pairs: a bondage-style black heel, a purple peep-toe and a tan suede boot with fringes. “We’ve taken the trends and made them wearable,” she says. »



COLLEEN BRADISH IN ALDO'S SHOWROOM; SKETCH, SHOE AND PROMO IMAGE FOR FALL 2008



Rudsak

“Rudsak is between the masculine and the feminine, not too flashy, more raw. For me, it’s affordable luxury.”



NOT SO LONG AGO, Xiao Wei was living the glamorous life in Milan, where she graduated with a master’s degree in fashion design at the prestigious Istituto Marangoni and mingled with the swanky design crowd. But when Evik Asatoorian, Rudsak’s owner, offered her a job, the Chinese-Canadian designer was happy to settle in Montreal, eager to start a career in fashion and learn about the Canadian market.

“Rudsak is one of the best fashion companies in the country,” she says of her decision. Less than a year later, she’s in charge of its design process, from research at the international trade shows all the way to quality control at the factories in China and Korea. Her language skills (she speaks Mandarin, Italian, English and French) and fashion flair have made her a valuable asset to the brand. As music blares in the Montreal office’s concrete lounge, the jet-haired beauty hurries around on her chunky high heels, wearing a little black dress and antique earrings that she bought in a

Florence market. Clearly, she is something of a magnetic muse. “Where Xiao comes in is new concept design,” says Asatoorian, making us espressos at the lounge’s massive wooden bar. “She truly understands women’s needs.”

“We first come up with colours that we like; say, an earth tone and a cold hue,” Wei explains, showing me samples of pasteltone leathers she’s working with for the summer collection. Long brainstorming sessions with the design team follow, where they discuss cuts, finishes and themes. The designers then work with the leather artisans in the musty basement workshop to find the perfect textures—wrinkled or smooth, metallic or matte. Finally, sketches are sent to the factories in Asia, the same ones that produce leather goods for Burberry and Barbara Bui. There is often a back-and-forth to achieve the right look—every piece takes several months to produce—and many designs are abandoned during the process.

“It’s very important to understand the market,” says Wei. “Canadian consumers are a bit more conservative, so I can do a few couture pieces but I have to keep it very commercial.”

For fall, the team chose a *Beauty and the Beast* theme, perfect for the season’s dark, romantic looks. There are shiny nylon puffer jackets with fur-trimmed hoods, fitted anthracite down coats in leather, elegant wool jackets with removable leather sleeves, and riding boots. For evening, there are boots with high heels and a short, black leather dress, which can be worn as a jacket. But even the hottest pieces are comfortable and solid enough for our winter’s chill.

“Rudsak is between the masculine and the feminine, not too flashy, more raw,” Wei muses. “For me, Rudsak is affordable luxury.” »

XIAO WEI IN RUDSAK’S SHOWROOM; RUDSAK ON THE RUNWAY AT L’ORÉAL FASHION WEEK IN TORONTO, FALL 2008



PHOTOGRAPHY: WEI BY JAMIE CAMPBELL

Bedo



“We don’t make fast fashion; you can wear our pieces for years. Everything I make for Bedo, I can wear myself.”



MARY NASRI WITH TANIA BERUBEIS; LOOKS FROM BEDO’S 2008 FALL AND WINTER COLLECTIONS



WHEN MARY NASRI fell in love with her now-husband, Peter, 21 years ago in Syria, she promptly joined him in his hometown of Montreal and took the role of head designer at Bedo, the fashion company he had founded in the '70s as a small discount clothing store.

Today, under her supervision, nine young designers create collections inspired by the international runways. “Our line has a distinguished, European look,” says Nasri, chic in a ruffled satin blouse, black cardigan and tweed pencil skirt, all Bedo. “We don’t make fast fashion; you can wear our pieces for years. Everything I make for Bedo, I can wear myself.”

Nasri’s desk is strewn with samples of new designs and sketches, mixed in with collages of her favourite runway pieces.

Givenchy’s neo-goth fall looks, for example, inspired a tuxedo theme for holiday: ruffled white tops, high-waisted masculine pants and lace detailing. Every season, seven collections are timed to arrive in stores every two weeks. Although the staff’s minds are already in Summer 2009 mode after trips to trade shows, the holiday designs are being perfected with the factories in China.

Nasri shows me the office’s design lab, and we peruse the fall pieces. Here, a quintessential black turtleneck is updated with fine pleating; there, a must-have paisley silk top ties at the neck with a long, fringed scarf. The tweed pantsuits are sharply tailored; the black skinny jeans are a cult classic for their comfort and flattering fit. For winter, there are down puffers, merino cardigans and shiny PVC carryalls. For

holiday, shiny clutches complement little dresses that come jewel-toned, embroidered or metallic.

With prices hovering at \$70 for a dress shirt, and about \$100 for an embroidered party frock, the brand’s pieces can be bought on a whim without the post-splurge guilt. That’s probably why the company’s wares have become staples. “If you’re buying at Bedo, you’re definitely getting something that is more unique,” says Tania BeRubeis, one of the company’s young designers. “It’s a small company—you can feel confident that no one is going to have the same sweater.” □