

# The great northern hope

## Jeremy Laing is putting Canada on the fashion map

by MAISIE WILHELM



Laing

WHILE CANADA has earned a certain amount of cool cred in the music world (thanks to a long list of indie bands from up north), the country has never loomed especially large in the fashion realm. Canada's profile has increased during New York Fashion Week thanks to Jeremy Laing, a Toronto native who has only been in business for two years, but already has critics on the edge of their seats in anticipation of great things.

"It's a bit of a novelty — even Canadians don't associate Toronto with a stylish place. But it's where I'm from, and it impacts my northern sensibility," Laing says over the phone during a brief break from his preparation for the fall collections.

Laing's decision to remain removed from the epicenters of fashion suit his modest demeanor. He has called himself anti-social, but his resistance to join the circus of celebrity only means his clothing can speak for itself. At first glance, Laing's designs strike with their subtle complexity and utilitarian design. His construction often features simple darts and seams incorporated in imaginative ways.

And at a time when some designers turn their noses down at wearable clothing, Laing's focus is shrewdly the opposite. "My aesthetic is not conceptual to the point of no longer being practical," he says. Women covet it for being "structural, subtle and clean." Laing first honed his craft while interning with Alexander McQueen in London. He later freelanced for the designer and developed his own identity.

When it comes to his own collection, Laing doesn't make big productions of his shows, and he doesn't care much about the red carpet frenzy either.

"I prefer to work with people I know, rather than use a stylist [to place clothes on celebrities]," he says referring to the trick most designers rely on to boost sales. One of his notable collaborations is with his friend, actress/director Sarah Polley, a fellow Canuck.

While the native Canadian takes some inspiration from his surroundings, such as the mineral print he created with a scientist or the "northern light" he looked to as inspiration for his upcoming collection, Laing is reluctant to be pegged as a naturalist. "There is an element of synthesizing one's environment, but I'm drawn to abstract references more than direct quotation," he says. "I'm not confined to the natural world." He is grounded firmly in it, though; more specifically, in Canada, which he loves for "the Mounties, Georgian Bay" and, he chuckles, "universal health care."



Sui on creating an empire where rock 'n' roll is queen and trends come laced in Art Deco

# Welcome to Anna land

by KENYA HUNT

It's very rare to come across someone who has stuck with and fulfilled her earliest childhood career aspirations. But from the moment she decided she wanted to design clothes at age 4, Anna Sui has been a remarkable study in consistency, building a global fashion empire on her Detroit rock 'n' roll roots. Sixteen years later, she's still as punk as ever, trekking to Coney Island to see the White Stripes or taking fashion notes from Karen O.

**Your work always has a certain rock 'n' roll sensibility to it. How much does contemporary music inform your work? What were you listening to as you created this collection?**

There's so much immediate nostalgia right now that I've been listening to a lot of older music. I can see the Led Zeppelin in my work. And there's also a Southern California, Courtney Love kind of feeling to it. But I try to keep up with the new bands too, like The Greenhornes. And I'm always listening to The Raconteurs and the White

Stripes. I love their new album. I try to go see live music as much as I can.

**Do you have any favorite concert venues?**

It honestly depends on the band. The band sort of makes the location

Karen O definitely do. I always look forward to seeing what they're wearing.

**I read that you once made a vow not to wear the same outfit twice in one year. How does that notion of never repeating**

**"I still have the fear of God in me every season."**

Anna Sui

special. I remember seeing the White Stripes perform at Coney Island, which was really incredible. And earlier this summer I was in Cornwall, England, for a literary festival and The Priscillas played there. That was fun to watch.

**Are you an avid reader?**

Honestly, no [laughing]. I do read, of course. But I'm not reading three books every month. I went to the literary festival to support a friend of mine and did enjoy hearing all of these beautiful works by authors.

**Are there any contemporary recording artists who you feel capture your sensibility?**  
The White Stripes and

**an idea translate to your work ?**

It's the ambiguity of what I do. I always challenge myself to try and make my work new and fresh. But at the same time, there's always an undercurrent of nostalgia. Maybe I'll do the same dress over and over again because designers have that signature. But I'll ask myself, "What can I do to make it exciting?"

**What have been the biggest challenges and rewards of achieving longevity?**

Well, it never got easier! I still have the fear of God every season. It's the same anxiety. I always wonder, "Will I be able to pull it all together?" Especially now that the

seasons are getting shorter and shorter.

**How would you describe the current climate of the New York fashion world compared to when you first started?**

I did my first collection in 1991 and it was a really fantastic time to show back then. People focused on New York as the fashion center. Now, more and more, Europeans are coming here to show in an effort to capture the American audience, which is so much bigger now.

**When creating your work, are you mindful of existing trends?**

Oh yeah. Fashion is about trends. It's really hard to go completely against the grain without alienating yourself from the editorials in magazines. But more than anything, I follow my instincts.

**In preparing for your last collection, you looked at a lot of Andy Warhol's early work. Does any particular period in art history play a role in your upcoming collection?**

I've been having a strong attraction to Art Deco recently. So right now, everything looks like Art Deco to me. I'll be out and see a gym suit and think, "that looks like Art Deco!"