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# FASHION GENERATION

LIZ GUBER visits *Paria Shirvani*, an up-and-coming Toronto-based designer making pieces with modern cuts and fabrics for a new class of consumers

A recent report released by Greenpeace titled “Toxic Threads: The Big Fashion Stitch Up” revealed shocking levels of toxicity in the fibres of the fast fashion garments (i.e. product from Forever 21, GAP and H&M). Chemicals banned in North America, but not in countries where the cheap garments are produced, reveal harmful, sometimes even carcinogenic or hormone disrupting properties. If that’s not enough to make you think twice about heading to the mall to load up on peplum tops (only to be relegated to the depths of our closets a season later), perhaps a trip to Paria Shirvani’s downtown Toronto studio just might do the trick.

Paria Shirvani is by no means an environmentalist; she is however, a part of the growing movement of local, conscious designers who care about resurrecting dying notions of quality and artistry. Born in Iran, Shirvani’s family came to Canada in the 1980s, opening up endless opportunities for Paria and her two sisters. Shirvani fell in love with fashion in high school, where she was in charge of the costumes for school plays. A George Brown college alum, she honed in on her understanding of garment production at Joe Fresh—a vocation considered to be a dream job for many fashion school graduates. “I have always been passionate about the construction of clothing and, from a young age, have enjoyed the process of piecing

materials together to create a garment.” After three years of working for the Canadian mega-brand, Shirvani left the job to start her own label, describing the transition as “seamless and intuitive”, adding “I was ready to branch off and create a line that embodied my personal aesthetic and allowed me the opportunity to have full creative control.”

Shirvani’s first collection, titled *Zephyr*, is the designer’s brave venture to independence. As the well thought out and carefully edited collection hangs on a rack before me, with its colour palette limited to dove grey, dusty nude and bone it displays the kind of mature restraint and effortless cool that begs comparisons to Alexander Wang and Isabel Marant. The collection also displays silhouettes varying from sharply tailored to fluidly draped—design elements generally mastered by only the most seasoned of designers. Being a fan of dressed-up sweatpants and moth-like colour palettes, I’m an instant fan, vowing to make the asymmetrical jersey skirt a part of my wardrobe come spring.

Shirvani describes her dream customer as someone who “likes comfort without the compromise to design and aesthetic. She has a strong sense of her own style and is able to merchandise her wardrobe into effortless chic.” The items in the collection reflect a modern sensibility, yet also boast a seasonless appeal, the styles will stay fresh and current for years to come.



# S NEXT



Shirvani's approach is very grassroots; she sources fabric from Montreal—noting that there is a lack of quality wholesale textiles in Toronto—drapes the silhouettes and drafts the patterns herself, and then cuts the fabric and makes the muslins (sample garments made from cheaper fabric that act as mockups). The sewing of the garments is then contracted out. “The process is more hands on and there is high control over quality, building a garment that is made to last.” The entire line is produced in Toronto, making it part of a burgeoning industry of homegrown labels. *Zephyr* was revealed to the public this past fall at OZ Studios, a contemporary setting that was well suited for the young designer, as it allowed for complete control of the production and instant feedback from the audience. “It was terrific. I could respond to questions and do on-the-spot interviews while the collection was on display in front of them.”

Paria Shirvani's clothes are sure to be snatched-up and styled to the nines by fashionphiles, once they are able to get their hands on them that is. Upcoming pop-up shops around downtown Toronto are in the works for this year. Shirvani also has plans to make everything available online. Next up for



Shirvani: her first-ever Fall collection. Although she didn't reveal any details about her plans, something tells me to expect more expert tailoring, interesting angles and a deliberate lack of print.

Standing in the designer's small, very neat space really makes one think. Two sewing machines, one table, rolls of fabric in a corner and some illustrations leaning against a wall, all in a space no bigger than 300 square feet—this is where the entire collection of fresh, inspiring ready-to-wear is born. I peek at the price tag of one item,

noting that it is on par with similar pieces at ZARA, convincing me to think twice before indulging in fast fashion again.