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Profile: Rad Hourani

The Canadian designer shares his all-season philosophy of fashion.

By Juliet Waters

Photography: Hourani by Angus McRitchie.



Last fall, in Paris during the Spring 2008 shows, the normal rules of fashion suddenly evaporated. Outside, coats were in Easter egg pastels: yellow, mauve, orange and pink. And inside on the runway, 25-year-old Montrealer Rad Hourani presented his first collection to his own electronica cover of "Paint It Black." Girls—and boys who could almost pass for girls—walked by, dressed in unisex leather and loose, gauzy knits, all in a sombre palette. The hair was summery, but the makeup was just a few shades shy of kabuki. A pair of tight white pants with white leather boots and a pretty white shift over black tights lightened the mood. Still, it was starting to look like death might be the fresh look for spring.

The spine-chilling show catapulted Hourani onto style.com's list of top 10 new designers. In an article on fashion and

global warming, The Independent quoted “the highly rated young Canadian designer” for this controversial view: “I don’t believe in four distinct seasons any more.”

Though he moved to Paris in 2005, Hourani still keeps a studio in Montreal, and we meet there on a blustery morning. The bright white loft is close to empty, but the mood is warm. Samples from the collection span the shortest wall. At the other end, behind an open bookcase, is a small altar of family photos illuminated by votive candles. In person, Hourani radiates the calm charisma of a tall, sexy monk. He pours me a wine glass of water before we sit down and chat about the roots of his career, starting with the first moment he knew he loved clothes.

“My mum was always going to get clothes custom-made and always taking me with her,” he recalls. “I saw how they made the clothes and how she chose the fabric... Then one time she went without me, and I was really mad.”

Hourani went straight from high school into a career as a stylist based solely on a reputation developed through dressing friends. “I didn’t even know there was such a job as stylist.” But he always knew he wanted to create a collection. Mostly this urge grew from trying to shop for himself. In men’s clothes, there was always “some little detail missing.” So he started shopping women’s plus-sizes, “but there were always little curves that bugged me.”

The resolution is a look that’s asexual, sleek and simple but also complex. From a distance, it seems industrial and futuristic, but up close the austerity softens into thin tuxedo pleats arranged in art deco shapes, elegant flashes of satin, diaphanous panels and stray fringes. These are beautiful, highly crafted clothes, but Hourani’s design priorities are practical. Made with materials that are tough but light, pieces are easy to layer. Innovative touches, like slits in the underarms of some leather jackets, also create clothes that can be worn anywhere, anytime.

Much of this comes from Hourani’s philosophy of fashion and global warming. “Wherever I go now, whether it’s New York or Paris, the climate changes so quickly from morning to night, from one day to the next. So I’m really interested in creating a wardrobe that travels well, with pieces that can be teamed with others to adapt to the seasons. That comes from global warming, but it also comes from me. I’ve always preferred to buy clothes that are all-season, and also pieces one could keep forever.”

The decision to move to Paris seems to have been based less on ambition than a genuine love of the city. “From the first time I visited, I knew I had to go there. There’s so much fashion there—real fashion. There’s an energy that’s very inspiring.” His major influence, however, remains closer to home. The person he now credits most is his friend and “muse” Brigitte Chartrand, owner of Reborn, the ultrahip Montreal boutique specializing in young international and local designers. Come spring, you’ll be able to find Hourani’s designs there or order them on-line (reborn.ws). They’re also available at select Holt Renfrew stores.

Future plans include Rad Hourani boutiques, which will sell a high-end collection and a more affordable casual line called Rad. If these seem like fast-track ambitions for a young designer, consider this: In February, [Hourani decided to add the New York runways](#) to his resumé. And you know what they say—if you can make it there...