

SPRING 2019 | ISSUE NO. 2 | AVENUE24.CA

AVENUE 24

M A G A Z I N E



LESLEY HAMPTON

A DESIGNER SPOTLIGHT: PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF
FASHION THROUGH INCLUSIVITY

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Special Thanks To

Lesley Hampton and the LESLEY HAMPTON team.

ABOUT AVENUE24

Avenue24 is a Toronto based fashion and lifestyle digital magazine. Created in 2015, our team strives to shed light on Canadian talent and cover the latest in fashion news around the globe.

From street-style to the runway, Avenue24 features all you need to know from the experts who know Toronto and fashion best

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark jacket and a patterned scarf, is working on a mannequin. She is adjusting a dark, pleated garment on the mannequin's arm. The background is a blurred studio or workshop setting.

WORDS BY NICOLE JARDIM

DEFYING THE NORMS

OVER THE YEARS LESLEY HAMPTON HAS MADE VALIANT STRIDES DEFYING SOCIETIES NORMS AND BRINGING TO LIGHT CRITICAL ISSUES THAT BOTH RESONATE WITH HER PERSONAL LIFE AND HER AUDIENCES. FROM PUTTING A SPOTLIGHT ON SIZE INCLUSIVITY, MENTAL HEALTH, AND HER HERITAGE SHE CONTINUES TO HELP BUILD AWARENESS THROUGH FASHION.

Lesley Hampton

Since inception the LESLEY HAMPTON brand has crafted remarkable and diverse evening-wear and occasion-wear pieces for a range of clientele. Founded on 4 pillars of inclusivity, identity, awareness, and heritage, Lesley's brand continues to inspire and resonate with audiences around the globe.

WORDS BY NICOLE JARDIM

It wasn't too long ago that Lesley Hampton emerged onto the fashion scene. Debuting her inaugural collection - *Gichi-oodenaang Ogichidaag* - at Fashion Art Toronto 3 years ago, she's continued to captivate audiences with her intricate designs packaged with powerful messages.

For Lesley, starting her own label had always been an aspiration. Since the very beginning, designing pieces in her parent's house, Lesley found solace in expressing herself through garments while highlighting prominent issues in society that resonated with her own life. Topics like inclusivity, mental health, and identity were noteworthy.

Although today she sits across from me in her own office with her own creative space, Lesley continues to stand by her creative process and incorporate the pillars of inclusivity, identity, awareness, and heritage into each and every one of her LESLEY HAMPTON designs.

Over the years we've witnessed the LESLEY HAMPTON brand grow substantially, being featured in a range of publications including Vogue UK, Marie Claire, Vogue Italia, Teen Vogue, Elle, Flare, and Allure, in

addition to having several influential figures like Margaret Trudeau, Vanessa Craft, Melissa Grelo, Liz Trinnear, and Roxy Earle bear her stunning collections.

With the spotlight once again shining down on Lesley Hampton this coming week as she showcases at one of the biggest fashion events in Canada, Toronto Fashion Week, the Avenue24 team had the privilege of sitting down with Lesley of the LESLEY HAMPTON label to talk about her journey as a designer and what we can expect to see in her upcoming runway.

To discover more about Lesley Hampton and her brand, keep on reading.

NJ: So you're prepping for Toronto Fashion Week, one of, if not, the biggest fashion events in Canada. How are you feeling? What's the journey been like since your last showcase at TFW?

LH: Oh wow, It's really exciting to be showing at Toronto Fashion Week. It's been a dream of mine since I first started getting into fashion design which was almost 10 years ago now. It's been very rewarding seeing

everything come full circle and knowing that I'm able to show at one of the biggest fashion events in Canada. It's funny, today on Facebook I actually saw that it's been 3 years since my first collection showcased, which is huge for me.

NJ: No way, that's amazing and such a long journey in such a short time.

LH: Yeah it really is. It was actually 3 years ago that I showed my first collection at Fashion Art Toronto. Going through the motions has been really fun.

But back to your question on the journey of my last show to this show coming up; it's been a lot of team building for both our internal team and external. Since the last show, we've been figuring out who we best work with. At the end of the day, we really want to work with people who support the brand the most and who I want to be involved with. The journey has definitely been a fun learning curve in building out the team.

NJ: Are you nervous at all? Or are you more calm and collected?

Designer Spotlight

LH: If you asked me that question last Friday I would have been really nervous but a couple of days ago we got our lookbook together. That means I actually have the photos of the live models in my garments. Since I received those images it's just been pure excitement.

NJ: That must be super rewarding! How is it seeing your collections finally on a model? I imagine spending so much time on your pieces and seeing them finally worn must be surreal.

LH: Yeah, it definitely is. As a designer, you usually start with a basic scribble sketch and then you're like "hmm that looks good" or you think "hmm I might have to take that out and switch it for another piece." Thankfully when we looked at our lookbook it was a "wow every piece looks amazing" moment. It was surprising but it was really nice at the end of the day.

NJ: In each of your collections, we love the fact that you bring to light important messages and drive awareness to specific subjects that resonate with your life. For example the Lithium FW18-19 collection was inspired by the lack of awareness, support and resources available to people who struggle with mental health issues. In addition, your latest SS19 FOYER DE LA VICE collection was inspired by Edgar Degas and his story of striving for unobtainable perfection. Can you give us any hints on the message of your upcoming collection or what it's inspired by?

LH: Each collection that I put out, each concept I create is based around something that I go through personally. Something will happen in my life and I project it through fashion design. Through fashion, I'm able to work through things in my life while sharing my journey with the public and more specifically people that follow the brand. It's a really

powerful experience.

For this upcoming season, the collection is all about Indigeneity and identity. Over the past few months, I've had quite a few interviews where people will ask me "How has being Indigenous influenced your design?" And every time I would think to myself; "Well it doesn't, this collection is about mental health and that's the focus, why are you asking me about my background?" After a few interviews, I took some time to think about it more and more, all while exploring my Indigenous background. Through this, I discovered that everything I do is very much involved with my Indigeneity - even though at times I didn't know what that meant.

This adventure of creating the upcoming collection has helped me discover myself, my roots and my community of Indigenous people in Canada and specifically Toronto. Growing up I was never around a reserve or the Indigenous culture because my mom was adopted, but I always had my Indian Status Card as a way to identify myself as an Indigenous person- which is very much a colonial concept that came into place with the Indian Act.

This translates into the collection which is called: Eighteen Seventy Six, the date that the government imposed the Indian Act. It really played a pivotal role in the way Indigenous people identify themselves which is something I really explore in the collection.

NJ: So let's explore this collection. We know from previous collections you've taken pieces and made them flatter the female figure - as opposed to hiding it- you really celebrate the shape of all bodies. What can we expect to see on the runway in terms of fabrics, silhouettes and colours?

LH: This season you will see a continuation of crepes and asymmetry, in addition to cashmere, beaded and embroidered fabrics, and pleated pleather. We introduce exciting colour this season with a bright poppy red to complement navy blues and blacks. The looks strong silhouettes and cultural inspiration are reminiscent of the inaugural LESLEY HAMPTON collection but with a tailored maturity that makes the Eighteen Seventy Six collection a powerful message to be shown at Toronto Fashion Week.

NJ: Inclusivity, identity, awareness, and heritage are the 4 pillars of your brand. Why do you think it's important to have conversations of inclusiveness and identity in the fashion industry? How do you see your brand adding to this movement?

LH: I think inclusivity is critical in the fashion industry, especially because of it's close relation to the media. It's something that designers and image makers have to be cautious of. Whether a designer is casting a runway show or a stylist is arranging an editorial photo shoot, we should always be striving to be more inclusive, because the images that we put out into the public are ones that are going to be seen by potentially vulnerable people who may have insecurities about themselves.

I think using our platform for the better is what we should be doing. Inclusivity is beyond important and I don't know why there are certain designers who aren't pushing towards that yet. Today, we still have a lack of curvy models on the runway and media, we have a lack of people of colour in fashion and media, we have to be more conscious thinkers in that sense and put our best foot forward.



“This adventure of creating the upcoming collection has helped me discover myself, my roots and my community of Indigenous people in Canada and specifically Toronto.”

LESLEY HAMPTON

Designer Spotlight

NJ: When the models for your show wear your pieces, what do you want them to feel, is there a persona that they usually have when they put on one of your garments?

LH: Specifically for the models, I ask them to walk empowered and confident. I usually feel that when they put on the pieces it's a natural feeling they get. That also translates into how clients feel when they put my garments on. It's great because a lot of clients will come in and say, "I can never find clothing that fits my body or my shape." Which is where I come in and offer them custom designer dresses in their size. You can see it in the changing room for both the model and the client, just how excited they are about the piece.

NJ: That's so monumental. For someone's mood to be so heavily influenced by a piece that you've created.

LH: Yeah it's a great feeling. Especially when it's someone who has maybe gone into a bunch of clothing stores and has struggled to find the right fit and feels discouraged. I think it's similar to how I feel when I go into certain stores. It's nice that they get that positive feeling when trying on my pieces.

NJ: On the topic of women, women empowerment over the past year has really turned into a huge movement - which really resonates with us as a primarily female-run business. Being a female entrepreneur yourself, what does it mean for you to be a woman who's started her own business and has continued to grow it from the ground up?

LH: It's exciting, I have noticed that within the fashion industry a lot of bigger brands or the ones that have made it to the top are male-led. So it's really uplifting to see this shift and

have women behind women empowering each other in addition to female-run brands supporting each other. It's just exciting and I hope we continue with it and continue to get stronger.

NJ: You've really achieved so much in such a short time span, it's incredible. Tell us, what are some of your greatest achievements as a designer to date?

LH: It's so hard to think of just one because there really are so many amazing moments. I would say the first would have been during my second collection. While I was in school I actually had the opportunity to dress Penny Oleksiak for the Canadian Screen Awards! I'd work on her gown in between classes, it was really exciting for me. That was also the first time that I got a red carpet question about my garment. I remember Ben Mulroney asking "Penny, who are you wearing?" and she said "Lesley Hampton!" I had a little school kid freaking out moment.

Leading up to right now though, I'd say that Toronto Fashion Week is going to be the biggest dream come true. It's an incredible experience and I'm so honoured to take part in it this season. Everything leading up to it has really been a highlight for me, so it's really exciting.

NJ: With that said, have you thought about branching out to New York Fashion Week, Milan? Or even Paris?

LH: Oh absolutely. Following the path of Sid Neigum would be amazing. He shows often in Paris and London. However, if I could continue with Toronto Fashion Week for a few seasons and build my name within Canada and maybe venture to New York, that would be incredible.

NJ: You've really accomplished so much and we can't wait to see you

showcase this incredible collection at Toronto Fashion Week. Do you have any last pieces of advice for emerging designers or creatives trying to start their own label?

LH: Don't be afraid to say no. If you're in a situation that you don't feel is great for you or your brand, get out of it. It'll distract you in the long run.

Before I started my brand I was in school doing my masters program and while I was in it I would think to myself "No, I don't want to do this." It was a big internal struggle for me to just drop something and say it wasn't what I wanted. I had that situation in my personal life too where I thought; "This isn't right for me, let's try it again." I think if you can learn about yourself more than your brand first, you'll be more successful in the long-run.

To learn more about Lesley Hampton and her label visit:

www.lesleyhampton.com

or follow LESLEY HAMPTON on Instagram here.



“I think using
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the better is
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be doing.”

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