MEET TALA NEHLAWI
AND 6 OTHER EMERGING DESIGNERS IN THE TORONTO FASHION SCENE
AVENUE 24
THE EMERGING CREATIVES OF TORONTO: THE DESIGNERS
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAYSON CACDAC

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Caetlen Couto

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

At Avenue24 we're always inspired by emerging creatives; The innovative designers, the unparalleled photographers, the fearless entrepreneurs and the remarkable models. They're shaping the industry within Canada and proving globally that we're a force to be reckoned with.

This editorial will kick-start a new series on Avenue24, one that will showcase emerging creatives within the Canadian community that we urge you to watch. Through a series of short questions, we're bringing you closer to the up and coming creatives that promise to take over the world - and who better to start the series than the people who fashion could not exist without; The Designers.

BEN ROGUL OF

BENNETT BESPOKE CLOTHIERS

Shaking up the suit business, Bennett Bespoke Clothiers emerged as a way to revolutionize the way men dress and think about suiting. Hand crafted from luxurious textiles and unique to each person, every suit is custom and meant to embody the wearer down to the very last detail.

Place of origin. I was born and raised in the downtown Toronto core. I've lived here my entire life and absolutely love this city.

Horoscope sign. I'm a Libra – well-balanced and very methodical.

What inspired you to create your own label? I'm fourth generation fashion. I originally went to school for music production. I knew I wanted to be in something creative but more on the business side and at the time I had an interest in music. When I realized it wasn't the industry for me I fell into recruiting. My journey led me to hire for Holt Renfrew and it was then that I knew I needed to follow my legacy in fashion. I was always drawn to men's suits and when the opportunity came to make the leap, I took it.

Dream celebrity to suit up? If he were still alive, Frank Sinatra. He took traditional style but always had an essence of cool and class.

In the fashion industry, what would you consider as "making it"? My goal is to educate men on style. I want guys to put their best foot forward and feel confident in the way they dress. Every man deserves to look and feel good. Whether they're into fashion or not, we're here to partner with them to educate and advise making a fun, easy process for all.

Describe your style. I'm very into gentleman culture and have no problem being the fanciest person in the room. I'm a fan of traditional looks but try to bring a modern twist.

KARL-HENZ FECU OF

KARL-HENZ FECU

Photo Credit: Thajell Fletcher

Still in the beginning stages of launching his brand, Karl-Henz Fecu says he's a force to be reckoned with. With the idea of creating modest and conservative clothing while taking a bold approach, we expect the launch of his first collection to be a huge hit.

Place of origin. I was Born in Haiti, in the capital city named Port-au-Prince. It sits on the Gulf of Gonâve.

Horoscope sign. I'm a Leo

What inspired you to create your own label? There are 3 factors that lead me to create my label:
1) To accelerate the worlds behavioural and mindset towards sustainability.
2) The ability to inspire others.
3) To enable a platform for growth in the fashion community.

How did you come up with the name of your brand? The brand name came after countless conversations with friends and Instagram followers. I came to realize that since the brand reflects some of my core values it would be best to utilize my name. My last name FECU which is not too common and it adds an exotic flair to my half French/ German first name KARL.

Common nickname? Mrfecu or karlito!

Dream designer to work with? I would love to be able to work with these 3 designers: T-Micheal, Iris Van Herpen, and Jeremy Scott.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? In 10 years I see myself having 2 boutique stores in operation. One in Haiti and one in Canada. That's aside from having a robust online shopping presence.

Describe your style. My style can be described by the brand slogan: Enrich Your Style! I seek to add purpose and value in the product that I create. To have a BOLD approached on quote "conservative or modest clothing."

CASSANDRA BURRELL OF

SHOP CASSANDRA ELIZABETH

Reigning from the east cost of Canada, Cassandra emerged on the Toronto scene with an agenda for inclusive and sustainable clothing. Having a booming online presence and the talks of an upcoming runway performance, she's proving that with passion and determination, anything is possible.

Place of origin. I am from Coldbrook, Nova Scotia!

Horoscope sign. Capricorn.

Name a designer that you look up to. Eileen Fisher is a designer I look up to. I believe in her values and ethics. I also think she designs a timeless collection and she will always be one of my favourites.

Describe your brand in 3 words. Seasonless, Ageless, Genderless.

Favourite part about being a designer? My favourite part about being a designer is the relationships I make. I don't know if it is possible to explain the joy I get when someone tells me how wearing my clothing can change the way they feel about themselves. I love that my clients feel so close to me that they share their journey. They have become some of my greatest friends.

Most pivotal moment in your career so far? Deciding to stay in Toronto and focusing on my company, instead of continuing my education with a masters degree. I truly believe in following your gut, and if I had of done what others expected me to do, I would not be living my dream, I would be living theirs.

Best piece of advice you've gotten. If you want to know if you are passionate about that you are doing, try to give it up, and watch what happens.

EDDY OF

INLIGHTEN CO.

If you thought you had seen it all in fashion you thought wrong. Inlighten Co. is a uniquely tailored fibre optic clothing and accessory line for both men and women. Designed with personalized features and wearability in mind, it's an innovative label for those who aren't afraid to stand out. Launching several years ago, Eddy, the designer, has already achieved great success with features in Vogue, Dragons Den and at Toronto Men's Fashion Week.

Place of origin. I was born and raised in Harbin China (Northeast China, close to Siberia), one of the world's coldest city in the world.

Horoscope sign. Taurus

What inspired you to create a label using fibre optic apparel? Inlighten was an idea encountered back when I was very involved in the rave scene. I liked how expression was taken to a whole new level. People wanted to wear the loudest colors yet still be comfortable because rave involves a lot of movement. I appreciate the scene and I wanted to give back to the community with something I knew they would love.

With that said, I think this technology is a great gateway to develop more functional yet appealing and wearable products. At Inlighten Co. it's not just about the product it's about the experience.

Name a designer you look up to. Yojhi Yamamoto.

One thing a lot of people don't know about your brand? We pay a lot of attention to detail in our designs and production. There are little surprises in the design. For example, we've included a secret pocket on the bottom rim of some of our popular styles such as the Revival and Promise hoodies.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? I see myself dominating the market and being remembered as the brand that put aesthetic enhancing wearable technology into people's wardrobes.

CAETLEN CUOTO OF

CAETLEN THE LABEL

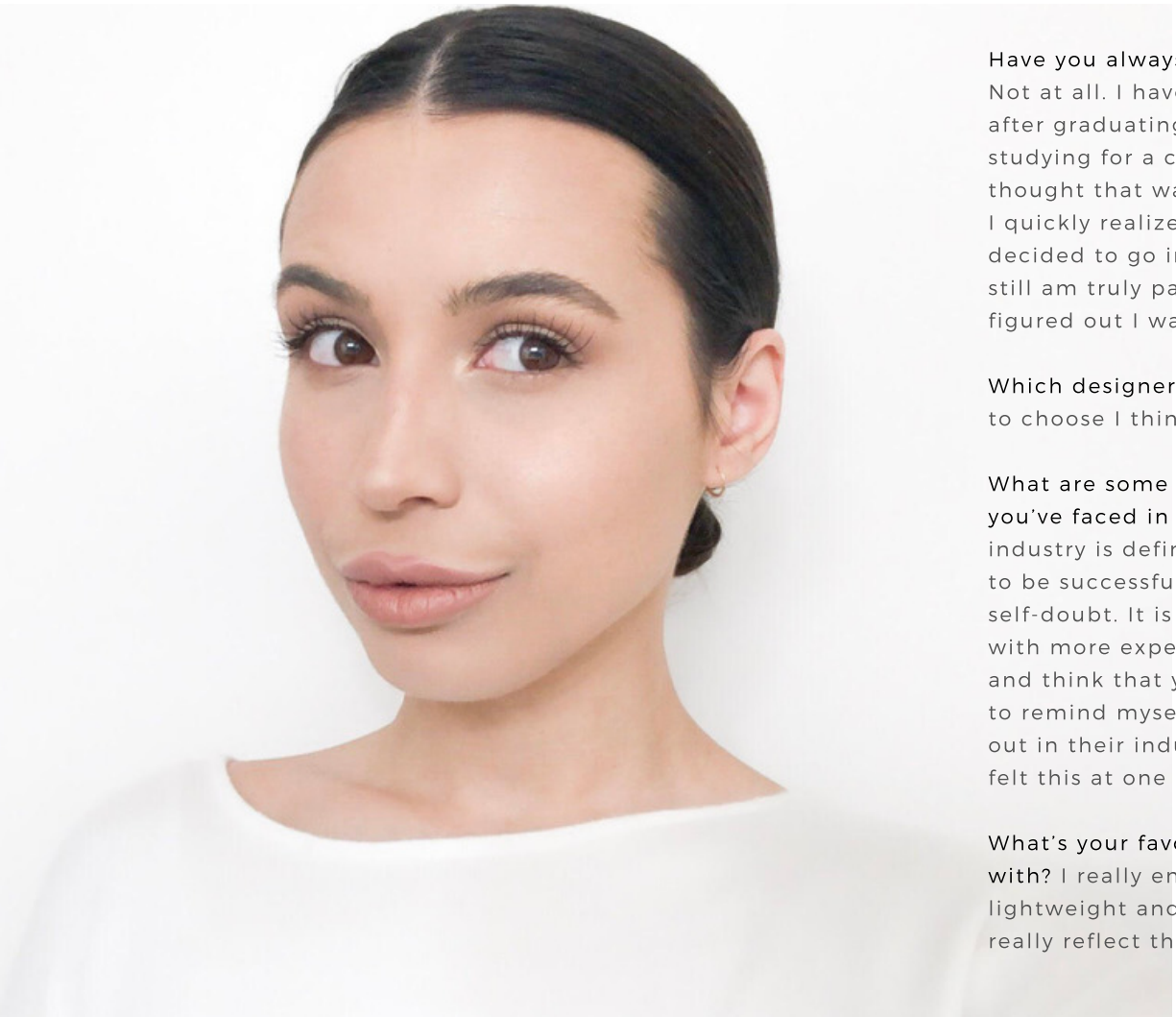
When it comes to creating timeless designs for any and every occasion, Caetlen Cuoto knows a thing or two. Developing her label shortly after graduating from school she's built a favourable brand that holds great confidence in the look and feel of each piece.

Place of origin. I was born and raised in London Ontario, Canada

Horoscope sign. Leo.

Did you go to school for fashion? I graduated April 2018 from the Fashion Design program at Fanshawe College.

What inspired you to create your label? I have always loved fashion but it was actually making the decision to study fashion design that inspired me to start my own company. When I was in my final year I really started developing my brand and working towards making Caetlen the Label a reality.



Have you always wanted to be a designer? Not at all. I have always loved fashion but after graduating from high school I began studying for a career in healthcare because I thought that was what I wanted to get into. I quickly realized it was not for me and I decided to go into something that I was and still am truly passionate about. That's when I figured out I wanted to be a designer.

Which designer inspires you most? If I had to choose I think my go to would be Dior.

What are some of the biggest struggles you've faced in becoming a designer? This industry is definitely difficult to get into and to be successful in. My biggest struggle is self-doubt. It is so easy to look at people with more experience and success than you and think that you aren't good enough. I try to remind myself that everyone just starting out in their industry of choice has probably felt this at one point or another.

What's your favourite fabric to play around with? I really enjoy working with anything lightweight and silky and I think my designs really reflect that.

XIAN ALEXANDROV OF

XIAN.ZONE

Fuse luxury and streetwear together and what do you get? Xian Zone. A bold on the rise label that is known for inducing bold attitude with innovative silhouettes. First entering our radar at Toronto Men's Fashion Week in 2017 with his awe-inspiring runway performance - Xian has continued to make extensive strides by expanding his label to younger audiences and wowing the industry with his fashion-forward pieces.

Place of origin. Montreal, Quebec. But, I was born in Harbin and grew up in Shanghai, China.

Horoscope sign. Taurus.

Did you go to school for fashion? Yes, I studied at College Lasalle in Montreal.

Have you always wanted to be a designer? Not really. When I was a child, I wanted to be a painter, an architect, and at one point I wanted to be a veterinarian. Now I have to admit that being a designer was always the right path for me, and it's so satisfying knowing that people are enjoying wearing my designs.

What inspired you to create your label? I'd say it got triggered after working with one of my freelance clients. Although I always had this idea of creating my own brand after graduating from fashion school, it was working with my clients that inspired me to take the risk and responsibility.

What would you say is your brand's signature piece? I would say it's our jackets, which is what the brand is known for, as well as what I enjoy designing the most.

Describe your personal style or aesthetic. What would you be caught wearing on your day off? I like the day-to-night transition. Sophisticated and rebellious. On a day off, I would go with a hoodie, a leather jacket or a bomber jacket, a pair of tapered jeans and a pair of chucks or combat boots - of course mostly in black.

TALA

NEHLAWI

Building a Brand From The Ground Up

BY NICOLE JARDIM

In 2017 Tala Nehlawi emerged onto the Toronto fashion scene by showcasing her inaugural collection DAMAS at Fashion Art Toronto. Inspired by the architecture and history from the city of her upbringing, Damascus, models walked one by one donning pieces that radiated empowerment through deconstruction and modernity.

Known to be incessantly inspired by architecture, Tala's self-named label: Tala Nehlawi blends contrasting elements to reveal abstract but wearable pieces. Using her designs as a way to spread messages and tell stories to the world, her collections have been known to inspire and spark conversation on important topics at hand.

Fast forward to present day, with the success of many runway shows, this designer and self-made business owner is in the midst of launching her first online shop and even prepping for a few major events. With the rapid growth of her business and an undying love for her craft, it was a no brainer to select Tala Nehlawi as our first featured designer for our Emerging Creative's series. Meeting her 2 years ago at a networking event in Toronto, her passion and skill have only amplified, promising only success in the coming years.

To discover more about Tala Nehlawhi and how she plans to dominate the Toronto (and global) fashion scene, keep on reading.

Let's bring it back to the very beginning of your journey, have you always wanted to be a designer? If not, what prompted you to begin this whole process?

Not always, deciding to become a designer was

something that came gradually to me. I would always find myself sketching in class back in high school, which is really when it all started. For me, I've always had a fascination with art but I just didn't know what kind. There were points where I wanted to be an interior designer and others where I considered being a DJ, somehow that evolved into me wanting to become a fashion designer! I think a big element that contributed towards my move towards designing was my family. My mom, she's very artsy and loves to paint and my grandma loves to sew. In that way, they both really influenced me.

Your brand is obviously always evolving as you grow as a designer. How would you describe your brand today and how has it evolved from when you started?

I would describe my brand as "upscale streetwear." I feel like it's mid-way through commercial and conceptual because I always want it to have meaning but also to be wearable.

Since the very beginning, I've always leaned more towards the deconstruction of garments. Not in a way that makes it look unfinished but rather creating a single unique look by fusing different clothing elements together. So, looking at one of the designs I did in a previous collection I took a men's necktie and used it as a strap for womenswear. I also took a women's blazer and cut it in half for one of my collections. I love taking classic styles and then adapting them to suit my brands narrative.

When it comes to designing what would you say has been your major source of inspiration?

When it comes to inspiration, I constantly find myself looking at pictures of architecture. It's always so fascinating for me to see ancient architecture next to modern skyscrapers. Especially during my recent travels, seeing architecture around the world has definitely shaped my collections.

Would you argue then that architecture been a constant source of inspiration, since you began?

Yes, definitely. I find that I'm just as inspired by it now as I was when I started. I always look closely at architecture to find inspiration in terms of silhouette, texture, colour, all of that.

You grew up in Syria, which your very first collection DAMAS beautifully reflected. How would you say that your city has influenced your designs in both your newer collections and your label as a whole?

Damascus is the worlds oldest capital to this day. In the city, there are a lot of handcraft's, they are very well known for their handwork in terms of plates, mosaics, textiles, which is something that really inspired me. When I was living there I always found new things to be inspired by; the old streets, the homes, you name it. My DAMAS collection was inspired by copper plates and the geometric shapes that appeared on these copper plates.

In terms of newer projects, I'm actually working on designing more accessories. In the past, I've done a couple of bags but I'm trying something new with these new accessory pieces. They'll definitely be inspired by mosaic Damascus.

Tell us about your most recent collection "JUX" that you showcased at Fashion Art Toronto. Watching it, there was a lot of colour involved, a lot of play on fabrics, I think it just really took your label to the next level.

The main inspiration was juxtaposition. Placing contrasting elements next to each other.

Like I mentioned earlier, mixing ancient with modern or stiff with flowy. This collection, in particular, used a lot of stiff fabrics combined with flowy fabrics. I also used juxtaposition with menswear, so using pieces that were traditionally masculine but presenting them in a feminine way. The ties and the blazers that I mentioned earlier, all of that. Complimentary colours also played a big role, using colours like yellow and purple together to highlight specific elements of a garment.

Being a more conceptual brand, there's obviously a lot of thought that does into each collection. Tell us a little but about your process for creating a collection?

So I have two things that I will usually do.

The first is I'll take pictures of architecture or whatever has inspired me and start creating silhouettes from that piece of inspiration. The second is finding inspiration from fabric. If I find a fabric I really like I'll just start developing something out of that. For me, inspiration can really come from anywhere whether it architecture or a specific material, but I have to be inspired before I begin the design process.

Usually, when I do get inspired, it will come as an unconventional time. I'll be sitting and thinking and then an idea will pop into my head. I'll go sketch it real quick - but, you know how many times it has happened where I think of something, I'll sketch it out and then not even a few weeks later I'll see it on the runway. It's actually insane. That's why I always say if you have an idea just go and create it right away. Today in the fashion world, everyone is getting inspired by the same stuff, everyone's mood board is the same - whether it be influenced by politics, music, or whatever, all of these trends are gearing creatives towards one thing. That's why you see all these similarities in fashion. If you have an idea just do it right away before anyone else does.

Yeah, it's crazy to think of the whole process for you when you're coming up with a collection because you create everything yourself. I mean a lot of designers have a team behind them, but you draw, sew and construct all the garments right?

Yeah, everything I create is from scratch. I like to do everything myself because I am a perfectionist. I have hired some interns in the past for samples and stuff but mostly I'll do it all myself.

When it comes to designing clothing, is there anything that you would really want to experiment with, in terms of like fabric, concept, colours, etc.?

When I went to Tanzania they used a lot of coconut tree leaves for their houses so that's something I'd love to tap into. I'd also like to experiment with natural fibres, creating textiles out of trees or plants and then embroidery as well.

Interesting, so would you want to take the root of becoming more sustainable then?

Definitely. I'm seeing the negative impact that the fashion industry can have on the environment and I feel like it's the right time to start gearing my brand towards being more sustainable.

What has been one of the toughest things for you when creating your label?

I'm a night owl. I get so creative at night and I'm so much more productive, but when I first started out it was tough to balance that and the duties that Last February I had the chance to showcase my collection at the Royal Ontario Museum. That was out of this world.

Usually, designers get showcased in museums when they've been around for decades or even when they've passed. Being an emerging designer and having my pieces showcased at the ROM was such an honour, and I really have to thank Seneca College for that opportunity. They made it happen and it was such great exposure.

Congratulations, that is a really huge opportunity. So having already done so much with the ROM, showcasing at Fashion Art Toronto, doing so many editorials, is there anything you have planned or upcoming in terms of projects or events?

Yes! I'm working on my website, so you'll see that I'm going to start selling online. I really want to do

"Being an emerging designer and having my pieces showcased at the ROM was such an honour"

a show or in some capacity show my collection in the Middle East. I also had an opportunity to showcase in New York this past year, but because of Trump's ban, I can't go as I'm Syrian, so I'm hoping next season that will be possible.

Are there any specific goals you would want to attain within the next couple of years?

Honestly, I feel like I want to go to Paris for a bit to study, I'd love to learn more about Haute Couture. I definitely want to go back to school, I'm good with constructing garments but I need more help with marketing and branding, all of that stuff. It's always been my dream to live in Paris for a little bit, plus I think it would be such a great source of inspiration for me.

Finally, what are some pieces of advice that you'd give to anyone who is emerging in the Toronto fashion scene, or the general fashion scene?

Always find a niche. Something that hasn't been done before, a gap that needs to be filled. Finding that is what will make you successful. Never every copy designers and be fast. If you have an idea go for it and be fast.

RAPID FIRE

Where are you from (be city specific)?

Damascus Syria

Horoscope sign.

My sun sign is Virgo. My mood sign is Sagittarius and my rising sign is Leo.

An idol you'd love to dress?

Beyonce, Meghan Markle and the first lady of Syria

Designer you look up too.

Jacquemus

One thing you couldn't live without.

I can't live without a goal to put all my passion into. And also my coffee creamer!

Best piece of advice.

Where there's a will there's a way.

Fill in the blank. I want my pieces to make people feel _____

Empowered.

AVENUE24 MAGAZINE
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