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Made in Quebec: Montreal's Signature Style

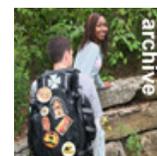


Photo courtesy of Travis Taddeo (Photographer: Matt DeRome)

Article by Katia Jean Paul

Montreal: a city oozing with cool. Where the fashion sense of the average urbanite draws from Milanese elegance mixed with New York street-chic. In spite of this, the era of increasing mass production and ample cookie-cutter wares in storefronts can leave one feeling out of options. Luckily, the City of Saints harbours a well-kept secret: locally produced unique clothing by the likes of innovative independent designers or, as I like to call it, the other side of Montreal's "prêt-à-porter".

Following the success of her 2004 "Russian Disko" collection, local designer [Valérie Dumaine](#) has become a household name in the metropolis. Dumaine creates one-of-a-kind pieces inspired by the '60s and '80s. At first glance, the clothes seem classic, but upon closer inspection, they reveal a truly artistic endeavour: hand-made structured garments, including form-fitting blazers and blouses adorned with striking



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detail. As Dumaine points out, “My clothes are classic, but with an edgy touch. They fit tight and well, have unique designs and are made to last.”



Photo courtesy of Valérie Dumaine

For Spring/Summer 2007, Dumaine introduces everything from pleated, high-waisted suspenders to jumpers and flowery dresses. The collection is, in her own words, “feminine, but cute- has a girly twist without being too intense”. When asked what sets her clothing apart from the rest, Dumaine explains: “It represents the Quebecois; cool and laid-back. Montreal fashion is not full-on American, nor full-on European, but more of a mixture. While I borrow from Berlin designs, I also use a mixture of things that represent the culture in Montreal.”

On the shelves of local shops are also displayed the crafty designs of Elaine Ho, the creative hand behind independent label Roadkill. Launched back in 2003, this clothing line offers [cute handbags](#) and totes adorned with colourful cartoonish designs. Simply put, Roadkill is “cute, but evil - lots of animals biting each other’s heads off!” says Ho. Unafraid to experiment with different prints and patterns, her rule of thumb is to ensure that every creation is out of the ordinary: “Well, I make everything for myself first!” In addition to leather wallets and clutches, Roadkill offers sterling silver rings as well as necklaces with deers, robots and ghetto blaster pendants. Every season, Ho also releases limited edition clothing. The latest collection is composed of unique mini-capes and summer skirts, “which can easily be paired up with what you already own”.

Firmly established in Montreal, this Vancouver native’s unprecedented creations are inspired by Montrealers’ fearless foray into the world of experimentation. “People here are unafraid to stand out, to try new things like locally made things. They’re not so label conscious and are just dying to stand out

They're not so label conscious and are just trying to stand out and be different."

Blackmission, another original indie home-grown label offers a refreshing twist to the corporate attire. Since 2003, Nadia Bunyan, designer for this exclusive Montreal line, has been mixing vintage with new materials to create clothing that is funky yet sophisticated. "Our fabrics are different. The prints and colours play off of each other. It's not about matching, but complementing." Plain and simple, Blackmission is "sexy without scandalous" clothing that accentuates what makes a woman, woman! Jackets, blouses, shorts, skirts and the wide-leg pant — a more flattering option than the skinny jean — are just some of the items that make up this versatile clothing line. What to expect from Blackmission this season? Chiffon tube tops and pleated jersey mini-dresses. "When I design, I think of what I would like to wear. And Montreal is a part of me, so my clothes represent Montreal, how vibrant and multicultural it is," explains Bunyan.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Calgary native [Travis Taddeo](#) creates "scandalous" asymmetrical dresses, jackets and tops with the ultimate goal of taking the fashion world by storm. "Mass produced clothing has nothing to do with real fashion. Real fashion is original, innovative, it makes you feel special. People should be more daring and shouldn't be afraid to seek out originality," says Taddeo. A recent graduate of LaSalle College, Taddeo's clothing is best described as "attention-grabbing urban street wear." Variations of the generic tank tops, jackets, party dresses and shirts make for "jaw dropping" pieces. "My clothing represents Montreal 100%. I thrive on the pulse that only this city has, a celebration of life, a place where people like to have fun." This season, Taddeo introduces [shiny zip-up hoodies](#), cowl neck dresses and hooded tank tops for both men and women that are sure to make heads turn.

In sum, a trek to local shops and boutiques reveal that there is far from a shortage of affordable, locally made clothing in Montreal. And fortunately for us, Dumaine, Ho, Bunyan, and Taddeo are not alone. A slew of young artists, fuelled by a love for fashion and fondness for the city, engage in the same labour intensive, time-consuming fanfare with the sole purpose of providing Montrealers with appealing alternatives to the all-too-safe, brand-driven market. The result? Made in Quebec original garments: a treasure box of edgy, innovative, sophisticated and, at times, extravagant ready-to-wear pieces for each and everyone of us just dying to unleash our very unique personalities. And now the secret's out!

For a list of boutiques in Montreal, [click here](#).

