

TAILORED LIBERTY



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LOCAL FASHION DESIGNER JOANNA WALA DESIGNS FEMININE BEAUTY FOR TODAY'S INDIVIDUAL WOMAN

IT'S ABOUT FEELING GOOD IN YOUR CLOTHES.

That's it. This is the mandate of Joanna Wala's clothing line Sofiss, a line aimed at young professional women. Wala, an established Edmonton-based designer, is setting the bar for local designers.

Known for using high quality fabric, and its fine-tuned tailoring that celebrates women and fashion, it's clear that the Sofiss standard is a high one. Wala's line has already gained some national notoriety, debuting in Toronto's Fashion week in 2004, and has been showcased across the country since.

But it takes more than a knack for sewing and a great idea to break into the fashion scene, and Alberta's capital city can be a hard sell both within the private fashion world as well as the public.

One of the biggest challenges, Wala notes, has been local media skepticism. Trying to break out in a status quo city that waits for the general nod of approval before jumping on the bandwagon, Wala has her work cut out for her.

"It's conservative" says Wala of the women's fashion scene in Edmonton. "It's difficult to sell to women who don't recognize the brand name".

But besides her relentless perseverance to crack a resistant market and her passion for creating fresh designs, Wala accredits much of her success in the fashion industry to her extensive education.

Bringing years of experience to her label, she has worked under several designers after graduating from the University of Alberta's Textiles, Clothing, and Culture program, and earned a degree in Fashion Design at Vancouver's Kwantlen University College. Wala knew that if she wanted to turn her childhood Barbie dress-up fascination into something serious, she knew she needed to get educated.

"Training goes a long way," says Wala about her experiences in the fashion industry

"I remember watching our instructor run his finger

down each of the seams to make sure they were exact," remembers Wala, apparent how much she now appreciates her meticulous teachers.

Training gave Wala the know-how to make people pay some serious attention, and, not to mention, set her apart from the young want-to-be designers. But it's really her intrinsic understanding of women – real women—that translates into her designs, setting her apart from the pack.

Wala's aware of the impossible standards that fashion typifies, creating a "love/hate relationship" with a waifish female body image, making many women—including many Edmonton women—afraid of fashion. Wala readily dismisses any limitations for women who don't fit the accepted ideal and designs. To make women love the way they look, to embrace their curves, the looks of Sofiss designs embrace pure feminine strength.

Now on the eve of revealing her 2007 fall lineup, Wala's fall designs will continue to be feminine added with something a little more edgy.

"I want my clothes to also convey strength in women... that [tougher design] will be coming in this fall line," she adds.

Edmonton is growing and so is the face of its fashion. So when asked what Wala would like to see happen in Edmonton's future fashion, she didn't use the opportunity to promote her own clothes or even to promote greater trend awareness.

Instead, she expresses a want for Edmonton women stop playing it safe and to play more with their fashion, and their image. Wala wants Edmonton women to escape the fear of fashion, to let go of concerns regarding trends and fashion faux pas, and to embrace whatever makes women feel good, an idea central to her clothing philosophy: "Even if you're wearing that t-shirt and yoga pant, you should feel good in it".

WEBSITE: WWW.SOFISS.COM



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-joanna wala