



Photo by Shane Kelly

Fashionphile

IN A TOWN WHERE DRESSING UP means putting on your good jeans (I know I'm guilty), you may be surprised to find out that St. John's supports a small but thriving fashion scene. From design to production to retail, there are cool people from here who are doing it themselves in our very own backyard. I mean, downtown.

CharlotteStreet Fashion

Charlotte Reid is the model of an independent artist. Or should I say, Charlotte Reid dresses models as independent art. Either way, Duckworth Street is home to CharlotteStreet, a studio and shop that boasts new designs, vintage and re-vamped clothing. A skilled designer and an accomplished seamstress, Reid runs every aspect of her shop - from rifling through rummage sales for material, to creating the clothing to (wo)manning the store.

Reid began her obsession with fashion at a very young age. Her grandmother was a seamstress, providing Reid with the impetus to cut up her own clothes. By five she had her own costume bank, and by seven was sewing on buttons and patches. Later, when she moved to Halifax, professional costuming called. After working with designer Gary Markle in the late nineties, Reid enrolled in the Costume Studies program at Dalhousie. Following graduation, she immediately began working in the industry.

Film productions were the first of the projects, and Reid certainly has a few big credits on her resume: *Wise Girls* (with Mira Sorvino and Mariah Carey), *How To Lose A Guy in Ten Days* (with Kate Hudson) and Newfoundland's own *Random Passage*. Perhaps the most notable project she has taken on is *Trailer Park Boys*, the outlandish comedy show that highlights the hoodlum hi-jinx of the bad boys of Sunnyvale.

However, big productions couldn't satisfy Reid's inner artist. The desire to make her own designs on her own label in her own studio was strong - hence the shop. CharlotteStreet opened its doors in November 2003. Her focus is original designs, but she will take on tailoring or re-sizing of her creations. Lately, Reid has been doing lots of reconstruction - taking apart old clothes and using parts for new garments. "Here in Newfoundland, my selection is pretty slim," she reports. "I can't always afford to fly to Montreal to buy new fabric!" she adds, laughing. So she encourages anyone to bring down old clothes - bartering and consignments can be done for material, especially nice vintage stuff.

While she admits that it's impossible to avoid absorbing what's 'in' in the media by osmosis, Reid asserts that she relies on her own vision to create her designs. "I try to keep current on what's going on in the rest of the world, but everyday I have new ideas... I think these days anything goes in fashion - you can be whoever you want to be and change up your look all the time." Her inspiration, however, often comes from period pieces. "I'm always rooting around for different vintage and costume pieces."

Reid runs a small shop, but she has visions of big-scale projects. Here's one to keep an eye out for, whenever the resources become available: Ten Paris Hilton types - strutting their stuff down the runway in sealskin bikinis. Ooh, that'll stir up some fun...

Twisted Sisters Boutik

Tenille and Jaclyn Ashley only opened Twisted Sisters Boutik just over a year ago, and already the shop has become a key part of the downtown St. John's fashion scene. It could be the level of comfort in the store - the lack of pretension when you walk in is refreshing in an industry so often filled with narcissism. It could be the laid-back approach to sales, where you're encouraged to browse and not pressured to buy. Most likely, it's due to the fact that the clothing and accessories in the store need no pushy tactics. They're sophisticated, elegant, and stylish. Even better, they're almost exclusively Canadian. In fact, most of the accessories are local.

The Ashley sisters grew up in Mount Pearl, and apart from the usual teenage interests, neither ever planned for a career in the fashion industry. However, after spending time living on the mainland and enjoying the variety available in small boutiques, they realized that there was a niche at home that needed to be filled. So the gals found a great location at the corner of Prescott Street and Water Street and put together the resources to make it happen.

Carrying clothing lines that are made here was one of the most important decisions for both Jaclyn and Tenille. "We wanted not only Canadian designs, but made in Canada. That way, we know where it's coming from - it's not coming from sweatshops, people are actually making a living from it - and we can feel good about wearing it on our backs and selling it to



twisted sisters boutik

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people." says Tenille. Besides, the clothes are great - stunning, high-quality garments that are reasonably priced.

The sisters say that the local products they carry are some of their most popular. In the past, they carried Erin Whitney's reversible tank tops - so well-liked that they sold out. These days they're carrying jewellery, handbags and even clothing prints by several local artists. Scraps Bags by Melanie Butt are all the rage - one-of-a-kind hand-bags hand-made from recycled clothing - and really hard to keep on the shelf. Aeryn Dodd's Stone Ice jewellery, which includes glass bead earrings (a more comfortable weight than stone) and beaded necklace is incredibly eye-catching. MMMWired jewellery, delicate and colourful wire-wrapped beadwork, is another hot commodity. Erin Smith's beaded necklaces and earrings, which are made from both stone and glass are the most recent addition to the ornament display case. Lila L. Création makes not only jewellery, but also crooked downtown house brooches. Linda Lafortune, the Lila L. artist, is actually a hat-maker by trade, so keep an eye out for those in the future as well. Tenille and Jaclyn also support printmakers: Lori Doody's etchings and lithographs of inner and outerwear are available at the store - several prints do double duty as decorative artwork, and her portfolio is available at the counter. They've got it covered. ☑

by Rhiamon Thomas



Melanie Butt started Scraps Bags two years ago and the young designer says the business is, "Growing and growing." Priced from \$40 to \$80 the hand crafted bags are proving to be a hit. "Once people have one, then they have to have a few more", Butt says with a mixture of surprise and satisfaction.

Melanie Butt is the daughter of a Pentecostal minister and she was raised in small Newfoundland towns where she says, "Everyone shopped at the same store." Perhaps that is where her desire to have something original springs from. Or maybe it flows from her mother, a woman who was always sewing and continues to run the production side of Scraps Bags for her daughter.

For the preacher's daughter turned businesswoman, this has been a quick journey. Butt graduated from Vaters Collegiate when she was 17. Two years at the Anna Templeton Centre was followed by two years studying jewelry design at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and two years later Scraps Bags was launched. Melanie Butt may have come a long way in a short time, but you have the feeling that for this artist/designer/business woman these are still the early days.

BAG LADY

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