

# Designers Who Love



## Peter Som

"A woman isn't a paper doll to me. I want to make clothes for her life," says this San Francisco-born designer, the son of architects (it shows in his strong, pure lines). "Reality is just as fabulous as fantasy. Fashion needs aesthetic excitement *and* practicality." His seven-year-old label is a fresh, pretty take on ladylike—feminine but never frilly.

*From left:* Aesthetic dermatologist Lisa Airan, MD, is in strapless jacquard (\$1,995). The red dress on costume designer Jacqui Getty is elegant with a sexy edge (\$1,195). Hallie Chrisman, Som's publicity director, wears a print based on an ancient Japanese tie-dye technique (\$1,495). Artist Lorna Simpson, who met Som when she needed a wedding dress, sports his leather anorak (\$2,495), camisole (\$1,395), and trousers (\$650). Necklaces, Nathalie Costes. All other jewelry, models' own. All shoes, Christian Louboutin for Peter Som.

# Women

The fashion stars on these pages represent a new generation with a new attitude—for them, there's no conflict between uncompromising style and wearability. Modeling their endlessly inventive and peerlessly chic clothes is a gang of their friends, fans, and colleagues. **Welcome to O's Real-World Style Awards.** *Photographs by Brian Doben*



## WHY YOU'LL LIKE HIS LOOK

**He has body intelligence** “I ask myself, *Can she wear a bra under this? Is she happy in sleeveless? If there are buttons down the back, who will do them up for her?*” Som says. He also makes sure that his clothes don't look good just on small, thin people.

**There's not too much skin** “He creates unexpected, asymmetrical silhouettes

rather than doing conventional sexiness or bareness,” says Lorna Simpson, which means you can wear his clothes everywhere.

**It's ageless** “My mom, who's in her late 50s, loves his designs,” says twenty-something Hallie Chrisman. “His own mother wears the collection as well.”

**It's versatile** “I design a dress with a jacket you can wear to work and then take off when you go out,” Som says. “I love to blur the boundary between day and night.”

**His lush fabric mix** Everyone revels in his pleated chiffon, cotton piqué, seersucker, washed leather, silvery lace, unusual prints.... >

# Adam Lippes *for Adam*

"Fashion has a bad reputation for drama. I'm about *happy*," says Lippes. Attractive prices help: "Coming from the high-luxury world of Oscar de la Renta, I asked myself, *Wouldn't I rather not spend \$2,000 on a suit?*" His rebranded company (formerly Adam + Eve), which began with hip underwear and T-shirts, overflows with elegant, art-inspired sportswear.

*From left:* Adam president Claudia Cividino throws a stretch denim jacket (\$345) over a striped shirt (\$295) and wide-legged stretch denim pants (\$285). A pleated silk satin shift dress (\$495) buoys Roopal Patel, senior women's fashion director at Bergdorf Goodman (which has carried Adam's clothes "since day one"). Shoes, Eileen Shields. Going with the flow of a long halter dress (\$595) is design consultant Coco Brandolini. Shoes, Gucci. Novelist Erica Kennedy (*Bling*) graduates from jeans to a stretch denim pencil skirt (\$295) and silk blouse (\$335). All jewelry, models' own.



## WHY YOU'LL LIKE HIS LOOK

**It's ready to wear** "Adam is very mindful of wearable skirt lengths, sleeve lengths, and ease around the waist," says Claudia Cividino. "Our customer is not necessarily 25 years old."

**Freshness without faddishness** "Adam is sensitive to changes in proportion and silhouette," says

Roopal Patel. "He recognizes that women want novelty, yet they also treasure special pieces that last from season to season."

**The painterly effects** Fabrics that "degrade" from pale to deep shades; stripes that evoke the work of Abstract Expressionist Morris Louis—the art world is a prime

source of color and ideas, Lippes says.

**His discretion** "Adam looks at the best parts of a woman's figure and shows them—but not too much!" Patel says.

**Shapes are casual but upgraded** Like a short-sleeved white shirt—in stretch denim; or a pencil skirt that feels like a chicer version of jeans.

# Edward Wilkerson *for Lafayette 148 New York*

"The key is our relationship with the customer," says Wilkerson. "I listen to what she wants: more color, longer jackets, sleeves rather than sleeveless." He does what makes sense for women. Which doesn't mean his work is untouched by his passion for travel and photography—his signature "global mix" evokes other cultures, but subtly: "Nothing costumey."

*From left:* Girls in their summer dresses never looked so good. Gayle King, *O's* editor at large, says she'd wear this beaded raw silk (\$498) to a cocktail party or informal black-tie. Jewelry, King's own. Shoes, Bruno Magli. A lacquered leather jacket (\$898) is a terrific update for the full-skirted dress (\$498) on Lucy Noland, a TV news anchor at Houston's KHOU, who says, "Edward is my favorite designer bar none—and I'm picky." Shoes, Giuseppe Zanotti Design.



## WHY YOU'LL LIKE HIS LOOK

**He's good at figures** The clothes come in regular, petite, and plus sizes. Gayle King raves about the way his dresses fit her small waist and flare over the hips.

**His pieces mix and match** It's no accident the pieces work together. "Often I do the same fabric in different colors so that things

coordinate more easily," Wilkerson says. "It's like packing for a trip."

**Nice surprises** There's a sense of discovery. "Incredible beadwork, sumptuous fabrics—you end up *petting* yourself," says Lucy Noland.

**Controlled bareness** The degree of exposure is up to you. "You can do a

lot of layering—a summer dress with a shrug or shawl, cape or jacket, depending on your comfort zone," Noland says.

**It's worth a splurge** "Lafayette 148 isn't everybody's idea of affordable," King says. "But it's rare to find clothes so upscale and chic whose prices aren't out of the ballpark." ▶

# Charles Nolan

Some people might be too haughty to admit they once worked for a corporate outfit. Not Nolan (who designed for Anne Klein and Ellen Tracy): "It taught me to put the customer first." That conviction—plus lashings of sincerity, authority, and romance—informs his four-year-old label, which channels, but never copies, the nonchalant charm of America's sportswear tradition.

*From left:* Ghylian Bell, who teaches yoga and makes organic teas, wears a lilac pantsuit (blazer, \$378; top, \$228; trousers, \$278). On model Alina Locklear, a perfect white dress (\$358) with a perfect ribbon belt. Human rights activist and author Kerry Kennedy gives a fairy-tale dress (\$1,798) a whirl. A dark pine waist-tie dress (\$278) and portrait-collar rain topper (\$698) are gorgeous on the designer's sister—and executive assistant—Carola Nolan. All shoes and necklaces, Charles Nolan. All other jewelry, models' own.



## WHY YOU'LL LIKE HIS LOOK

**It has cross-generational appeal** "I make pieces that a 20-year-old and an 80-year-old can wear," says the designer. Ghylian Bell, 44, once went after the same jacket as Nolan's chic, practically ageless mother-in-law—at a sample sale.

**The ease factor** Clothes are closely fitted at the rib cage rather than at the waist, where anything tight can pinch.

**Bonus:** The raised focus makes petite women look taller.

**Meticulous detail** Nolan is a perfectionist, yet his collection doesn't look fussy. It's modern, streamlined—no unnecessary doodads.

**Clothes with modesty and dignity** "Charles and I both come from

big Irish-American families," Kerry Kennedy says. "His clothes are feminine and sexy, but you'd be comfortable wearing them in front of a nun...or your mother."

**The fits are democratic** Nolan's designs work for size 2 or 12–14; for the tall or small. "That's my definition of real success," he says.

# Maria Cornejo *for Zero + Maria Cornejo*

"A woman shouldn't be a sandwich board for the designer," says Chilean-born Cornejo, whose first New York store (there are now two) dates from 1998. "My clothes have a cool edge, but they don't overwhelm the wearer." There's an artistry and intelligence to her geometric pieces that make them come alive on the body: "It's the way the fabric falls."

*From left:* A patent leather coat (\$1,380) gleams over a drapery dress (\$676) on friend and business partner Marysia Woroniecka. Shoes, Marc Jacobs. Daughter Bibi Cornejo Borthwick balances a bomber jacket (\$667) and pencil skirt (\$444). Shoes, Manolo Blahnik. A poncho dress (\$591) and cropped pants (\$462) empower Kenyan-born artist Wangechi Mutu. Shoes, Modern Vintage. Maria Cornejo wears her layered work uniform: silk charmeuse tank (\$294) and jumpsuit (\$658). Shoes, Cornejo's own. All jewelry, models' own.



## WHY YOU'LL LIKE HER LOOK

**There's nothing stiff or tight** Many pieces don't have shoulder or side seams, which eliminates extra bulk and follows the natural line of the body. While this isn't baggy stuff, it never restricts you.

**It has staying power** "My clothes aren't obsolete after the season is over," Cornejo says. "I hate waste." The

museum-quality timelessness of her designs is underlined by her 2006 Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award.

**...and layering power** Cornejo wouldn't wear a miniskirt alone, but she would wear one over pants. Her 16-year-old daughter, Bibi, came to the photo shoot with Cornejo's

poodle-texture coat over her school uniform.

**It's adaptable** "I'm big into multifunctional clothing," says Wangechi Mutu. "Often I have to go from the studio to something more formal. Maria understands the city, the speed of life, women's different roles." ▶

# Michelle Smith *for Milly*

Michelle Smith interned in Europe with luxury-goods heavyweights Hermès, Vuitton, and Dior—one reason her collection, which debuted in 2000, has such superior quality and workmanship. Unlike those houses, however, she doesn't charge prices only the superrich can afford, and she isn't caught up in attention-getting, over-the-top runway stuff. "Wearable,' to me, is the ultimate compliment," she says.

*From left:* On Dayle Haddon—UNICEF ambassador, L'Oréal spokesperson, author—is a go-anywhere strapless dress (\$338) and cardigan (\$221). Shoes, Manolo Blahnik for Milly. Michelle Smith is in a beaded print shift (\$470). Shoes, Manolo Blahnik for Milly. Longtime friend Vanessa Hart wears a silk top (\$248) and pencil skirt (\$248). Shoes, Jimmy Choo. The "unsuit"—trousers (\$268), top (\$239), and jacket (\$446)—is on Milly marketing director Beth Rothenberg. Shoes, Rothenberg's own. Milly staffer and design student LaToya McLean enjoys a square-neck top (\$209), skirt (\$234), and cardigan (\$221). Shoes, McLean's own. All jewelry, models' own.





## WHY YOU'LL LIKE HER LOOK

**There are options for different bodies**

"I make a sleeveless dress but also one with sleeves," says Smith. "A few years ago, my skirts got pretty short, and customers complained. Now I build in a bigger hem so people can let it down if they want."

**Its fun spirit** Her happy palette and whimsical shapes are inspired partly

by Michelle's mother, "a child of the '60s. I loved her bright minis, fantastic coats, and go-go boots."

**The built-in accessories** Notice-me prints, lively colors, and fanciful details (beading, dramatic buttons, gold chains) mean that you don't need additional embellishment, which simplifies life. "I'm superbusy. I can't

be overdressed or schlumpy," Haddon says, "and I must be comfortable."

**It's youthful but not silly** The clothes are adorable enough to appeal to 29-year-old LaToya McLean, while also discreet enough for people in their 50s and 60s. Now 35, Michelle says, "As I get older, my collection is maturing, too." ▶



# Kevin Carrigan *for Calvin Klein*

Carrying on in the spirit of Calvin Klein for the label's bridge collection is behind-the-scenes powerhouse Kevin Carrigan, who sees himself more as a problem-solver—with all the nuts-and-bolts fashion savvy that implies—than a flamboyant creator. “I spend a lot of time on fabric and fit,” he says. “It’s all about lines. The simpler, the more effective.”

*From left:* Icelandic model Edda Petursdottir glows in a silk charmeuse top (\$128) and wide-legged denim pants (\$98). “This is utterly wearable,” says author and producer Crystal McCrary Anthony of her flirty dress (\$168). “It can swing from day to evening.” Jewelry designer Zani Gugelmann loves the drape of this silk gown (\$218). Crystal Renn, a plus-size model, wears an Empire-waist dress (\$128) that makes everything look longer. All shoes, Calvin Klein.



*Fashion editor:*  
Jonny Capitain  
*Hair:* Moiz  
*Makeup:* Susan  
Giordano  
*Set design:* Kyru  
Cheney for  
Mury Howard  
Studio

## WHY YOU'LL LIKE HIS LOOK

**The slenderizing threads** A sleek, minimalist cut does make women look leaner. But, says Carrigan, “although the perception of the Calvin Klein style is a very slim body type, in actuality we do the whole range, including petites and plus sizes.”

**It goes beyond black-and-white** Nothing comes between Calvin and

his neutrals, but Carrigan also introduces strong, lively colors.

**It's not too frilly** Calvin Klein's famous pared-down aesthetic is not only attractive but also wonderfully practical. “I like something simple and chic that I can wear during the day and go out in at night,” says Crystal Renn.

**Ease of movement** There's room to live. “I'm not a size 0, and I like to eat when I go out!” says Crystal McCrary Anthony. “His evening clothes allow me to have dessert.” Zani Gugelmann adds, “I love the flowy skirt of this dress because I have a Latin body—there's more on the bottom than the top.”

# Phillip Lim for 3.1 Phillip Lim

Lim was just 31 (hence the company name) when his label launched in 2005, and success has been swift—last year he won a Council of Fashion Designers of America's Swarovski Award for Emerging Talent. There's a lovely restraint to his clothes that appeals to many women. "I never think in terms of age, class, or race. My line is more about kindred spirits," he says.

*From left: Ardent fan Jessica Longshore, public relations coordinator for Nars Cosmetics, praises Lim's "pops of color"; her rucked orange blouse (\$375) and narrow yellow belt set off cuffed, wide-legged chalk trousers (\$340). Shoes, Philosophy di Alberta Ferretti. The pale peach pencil-skirt dress (\$350) on Lim cofounder and CEO Wen Zhou has a flattering drape around the neckline and hips. Shoes, Zhou's own. Her 6-year-old daughter, Ming, wears a tiered pony print cotton dress (\$135) from the new Kid by 3.1 Phillip Lim collection. For details see Shop Guide.*

## WHY YOU'LL LIKE HIS LOOK

**The thoughtful details** "Dresses have functioning pockets," says Wen Zhou. "Trenchcoats have belts that button on so you don't lose them. Jacket linings are silk because they're easier to slip on."

**An accommodating fit** Lim shapes all of his clothes on "a real woman with hips and breasts," making sure to

build in "a little give and take." His pants are considerably high-waisted rather than unforgivingly low-slung, so that you don't have to worry about flashing skin when you move around—no gapping.

**Smart cuts** "His clothes are very body-conscious but not revealing or overtly sexy," Zhou points out.

"The shoulders are higher and narrower so that you look alert and not sloppy."

**There's nothing crazy** The sophisticated lines of his designs are up-to-date yet not so trendy that they're in danger of being in fashion one day and out the next. Lim once described his style as "classic but twisted." 

