

STANLEY CARROLL

Designing Outside of the Box

Sitting at a small, circular table adorned with a telephone and a lone sketchbook, Stanley Carroll appears poised yet inherently at ease. The designer — who first launched his eponymous label three decades ago — has the air of an accomplished creative-type, speaking confidently yet modestly about his long list of accomplishments. The most notable of which, however, is his resolve to honour artistic integrity above all else. "In being the kind of designer that I try to be, the focus is primarily creative," Carroll says from his Edmonton studio.

"You're working in a professional environment so you have to address the realities of a commercial industry, but at the crux you're trying to make a creative statement that's true to you. If I don't think a dress is exemplary of my style, I won't use it no matter how good it is."

This dedication and self-assuredness has come to define the designer, whose aesthetic is a rare breed of minimalism peppered with European sophistication. The latter comes from a childhood spent in Holland, before Carroll relocated to Canada with his family at age 16.

"The minimalistic aspect of my clothing is what makes it believable, while the European twist is what keeps it interesting," he says.

"My brain will always lean towards a European mindset of dressing for a number of reasons. Stylistically, I think Europeans tend to be a bit more comfortable in their skin and are more inclined to experiment, which really inspires me."

Apart from European street style and café culture, Carroll's influences vary seasonally and encompass everything from travel and literature, to pop culture and even his own life.



Credits:
Models: Andrew & Elizabeth
Makeup: Amber Prepchuk
Photographer: Richard Siemens

This season, Carroll sums up his sartorial offerings in three words: Happy, whacky and eclectic. The latter stems from the diverse fabrics Carroll sourced from around the world, lending equal parts whimsy (silk dresses covered with airy clouds) and ethnic appeal (sari materials and tribal-inspired prints) to the collection.

"The fabric story is bigger for me this season that usual, so there's more print and a lot more colour than I normally use," he says. "I still experiment with shape and volume, but this use of fabric has provided a new aesthetic for me."

The designer could have based his company out of a more fashion-forward city, yet true to maverick status, he chose instead to call Edmonton home. This calculated move speaks not only to Carroll's individuality, but to his rejection of prescribed industry standards as well.

"I've always found it very limiting, and after a while you start to question why things are done a certain way," he says. "So there are a number of things that I looked at that the industry does for understandable reasons, but I decided it's just not for me." Like limiting himself to creating on a seasonal basis, or even selling his collections through retailers. Instead, the veteran designer creates on an ongoing basis, opting to sell his work online and through pop-up shops, a method he finds particularly successful.

"The one great advantage to living and working in a place like Edmonton is that there are no rules; if I were in Toronto I would have been stylistically pigeonholed a lot sooner, where looks and markets are determined for you. You might do well commercially, but creatively you work in a box." And if there's one thing that Stanley Carroll is not, it's creatively stifled.



"What you encounter each and every day will to some extent impact you, and people who work in creative environments tend to develop their voice this way," he says.

"Simply put, inspiration comes by waking up every morning and looking around." Style blogger Andrew Erich credits Carroll as a major influence, and has admired his work since he first saw the designer present his Spring/Summer collection at Western Canada Fashion Week last year.

"Stanley has a chicness and simplicity to his designs that make them incredible and timeless. The ease and elegance of his clothing stems from his natural ability to understand and create great fashion," Erich says.

By Vickie Lalotitis et