CANADA 150

From humble beginings, to present day

since

Fashion in TORONTO 1867

Even in the time of Confederation, Toronto the Good had a severe case of fashionable society. A satirical correspondent for the Canadian Illustrated News, circa 1870, describes how wealthy young Torontonians would "do King" by engaging in a ritual promenade along a particular stretch of King Street.

"Performing, as it was, 'Kotow' to the goddess of Fashion, and sacrificing to her sister divinity of Society." (Canadian Illustrated News, 1870)

King Street was Old Toronto's luxury shopping destination. The third-largest city in the Dominion of Canada, Toronto was the new country's English-speaking commercial center, with roughly half the population of the older, Francophone Montreal. In stark contrast to the cultural pluralism of modern Toronto, society was dominated by an Anglo-Protestant, colonial elite. Inspired by fashion reporting in American magazines like Godey's, Leslie's and Demorest's, the city's style-conscious could get a wardrobe update at dry goods emporia like Robert Walker and Sons, a.k.a. The Golden Lion, on the site of today's King Edward Hotel, or Graham's Temple of Fashion in the St. Lawrence Hall.

Atop the city's hierarchy of tailors and dressmakers were fine establishments like ladies' tailor O'Briens Limited and William Stitt and Company – rarities in having the prestige to label their couture. (Canada and haute couture were born within a year of each other: Englishman Charles Frederick Worth established the Chambre syndicale de la haute couture in Paris in 1868.)

Stitt & Co. were the favorite dressmakers of Ishbel Marjoribanks, Countess of Aberdeen, a Scottish aristocrat and progressive who, as the wife of Governor General John Campbell Gordon, was a leader of society in 1890s Canada. One of Ishbel's achievements while the mistress of Rideau Hall, was founding the National Council of Women. This autumn, her great-great-granddaughter, Lady Anna Gordon, became the first member of the British nobility to enter into a same-sex marriage.

In December 1897, to mark the close of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year, the Countess of Aberdeen hosted a Victorian Era Ball at the Armouries on University Avenue. Twenty-five hundred guests came to this fancy-dress celebration of the British Empire. Ishbel's eighteen-year-old daughter, Lady Marjorie, went as the Forests of Canada. As the Globe reported, the Countess was "regal" in a blue velvet gown trimmed in ermine; her petticoat and court train embroidered in gold with Celtic designs. The outfit made a political statement: it showed her support for Irish Home Rule. The Celtic Revival embroidered elements were repurposed from a dress by Mary Sims, "the Worth of Dublin," made while Lady Aberdeen

Opposite Page CN Tower Jumpsuit, ca. 1976, Ryerson Fashion Research Collection FRC2014.99.003, Anonymous donation. Photo by Jazmin Welch. Image courtesy of Ryerson University.

written by

Dr Sarah Sheehan

Born and raised in Ottawa, the home of CanCon, Sheehan spent over two decades in Toronto. She walked in a few local fashion shows in the late '90s, including one at the Catacombs and Ingrid Z's controversial art show at York University. Sheehan has written about fashion for Hamilton Magazine, FASHION, and her blog, PatternVault. She lives in downtown Hamilton.

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was vicereine in Ireland. Like the gown she wore in Montreal just weeks later, the Toronto ensemble may also have been custom-made by William Stitt and Co.

Outside high society, custom dressmaking was on the wane. Ready-made clothing became increasingly accessible thanks to technological advances like steam power, railways, and sewing machines. The new "departmental" stores hedged their bets by selling both ready-made and custom garments, with tailoring and dressmaking services on-site. Within two years of Confederation, Timothy Eaton of the T. Eaton Co. brought his retail vision to Queen and Yonge (inside the footprint of today's Eaton Centre). The rival Robert Simpson Co., established soon after, moved to the south side of Queen Street (now the Bay and Saks) in 1881. Eaton's and Simpson's mail-order catalogs were quickly disseminating the latest styles nationwide.

Signs of Canada's fur-trade heritage remain even today, clustered along Yonge Street. The late-Victorian Dineen Building at Yonge and Temperance Street, now home to the Dineen Coffee Company, was built in 1897 to house the showroom of W. and D. Dineen, furriers; the sign of another furrier, Robert Fairweather (est. 1867), is still visible near Yonge and King. Early 20th-century Toronto saw the addition of Creeds and Company. It was founded as a furrier's by Jack Creed, who had trained in Paris after fleeing pogroms in Tsarist Russia. Creeds later pioneered in-store designer boutiques under Jack's son, Eddie. From 1910, another furrier-turned-department store, Holt, Renfrew, and Company, made its Toronto home in the Elgin Block, just south of the Dineen Building. (Holt's began as a Quebec business; the company's headquarters didn't move to Toronto until the 1970s.)

Despite its famously long history, the Hudson's Bay Company had no retail presence in eastern Canada until the early 1960s, when it bought Morgan's, a Montreal chain with a local flagship at Bloor and Yonge.

Unless you lived in the Junction, Ontario's short-lived Prohibition ended in 1920. Prosperous, Deco-era Toronto was bursting with fashion options for the smart set. The MacLean Publishing Company launched Mayfair, high fashion and society magazine along the lines of Condé Nast's Vogue or Vanity Fair, in 1927. The cover of Mayfair's second issue, showing a blushing bride at her church wedding, is revealing of a society still faithful to the notion of universal Christian values. For readers of more modest means, MacLean's had Chatelaine, with a section devoted to the latest Vogue sewing patterns. By the end of the decade, Toronto's best-dressed could lunch or take in a fashion show in Simpson's Arcadian Court or

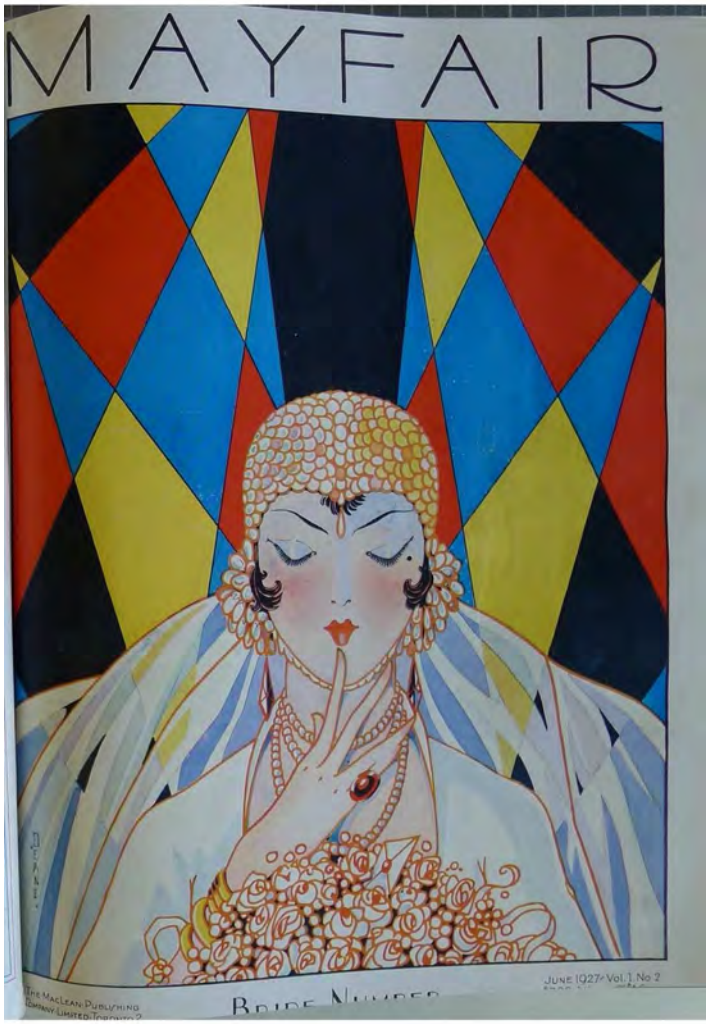
Jacques Carlu's Round Room, further up Yonge Street in Eaton's sparkling new College Street flagship.

For the finest in exclusive, high-end fashion, elite clients could visit the formidable Madame Martha. Madame Martha made couture garments in her salon at 600 Bay Street until 1929, when Mayfair announced the sale of her business. (The Gray Coach Terminal opened next door soon afterward.) An early advocate for the Canadian fashion industry, by the 1930s she was Simpson's in-house couturier, available for consultation in the third-floor French Salon. In 1946, Yousuf Karsh took her portrait.

Ryerson's fashion program – founded with the college in 1948 – laid the foundations of Toronto ready-to-wear. As in the old Dominion of Canada, postwar haute couture

Yousuf Karsh, Madame Martha, 1946. Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada.

Opposite Page **Top** Ishbel Maria (Marjoribanks) Gordon, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, 1897. **Bottom** Bridal illustration by Elsie Deane on the cover of Mayfair's second issue, June 1927. Courtesy of the Magazines, Travel and Middlebrow Culture in Canada Project.



had twin centers in Montreal and Toronto. In 1954, when Montreal couturier Raoul-Jean Fouré formed the Association of Canadian Couturiers, the exclusive group included two Toronto designers: Tibor de Nagay, a recent émigré from Paris, and Federica, a former Paris buyer who had relocated from Milan. But the consortium was limited by a lack of design protections and the need to use only Canadian textiles.

Sourcing the right fabrics was still a challenge in the 1960s when Toronto boutique fashion engaged with contemporary trends like loungewear and the decade's youth culture. Lingerie designer Claire Haddad, who inherited her Syrian-Lebanese parents' garment business, used imported silks hand-painted by local artists. Formerly of Detroit, Marilyn Brooks (who became the first president of the Fashion Designers Council of Canada) first sold her flamboyant clothes at the Unicorn on Gerrard Street, while London expat Pat McDonagh showed her take on the Carnaby look at the Establishment on Bloor. When the CN Tower opened to the public in 1976, staff wore uniforms designed by McDonagh and Brooks. A jumpsuit by McDonagh bears a CN Tower print in gray and sienna; Brooks' version was silver nylon.

The Toronto fashion industry was coming into its own.

Toronto Life FASHION launched in 1977, Flare in 1979. By the early '80s, Alfred Sung had partnered with the Mimran brothers, and Vivienne Poy – later Canada's first senator of Asian descent – was selling her signature knitwear from her Yorkville boutique. Daniel Storto began his glove-making odyssey. Comrags, now a Toronto institution, was founded in 1983 by Joyce Gunhouse and Judy Cornish, who met at Ryerson. M.A.C., conceived in 1984 as a

professional makeup line by “The Franks” (Frank Angelo and Frank Toskan), opened its first counter in the Simpsons basement; the brand got a boost when Madonna wore Russian Red lipstick on her 1990 Blond Ambition tour. And two hugely popular television shows, CityTV’s widely syndicated Fashion Television, hosted by Jeanne Beker, and CBC’s Fashion File with Tim Blanks, brought runway buzz to a global audience. During the ’90s recession, the city rebranded the historic garment district as the Fashion District, and the Bata Shoe Museum, designed by Moriyama & Teshima Architects, opened at Bloor and St. George. Toronto labels Lida Baday, Mercy, and David Dixon were successful exponents of the decade’s minimalism and vintage-inspired style. Mercy designers Jennifer Halchuk and Richard Lyle met at the Toronto Fashion Incubator, a City of Toronto initiative that continues to flourish under director Susan Langdon. (Current Toronto Fashion Incubator success story: Sid Neigum.) The daughter of Japanese-Canadian garment workers, Langdon made the non-profit incubator into a model venture, adopted by other cities.

By the end of the decade, local labels had an official umbrella organization for the seasonal runway presentations in Toronto Fashion Week. Thanks to global industries like finance and entertainment, 21st-century Toronto has become a thriving, cosmopolitan center. During Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), the Victorian fashion parade is reborn in King Street celebrity-watching. A stylish public can enjoy fashion exhibits at the Design Exchange, housed in the old Toronto Stock Exchange on Bay Street, and the ROM’s Patricia Harris Gallery of Textiles & Costume.

A 1969 Claire Haddad clothing advertisement for Eaton’s Courtesy of Estate of Claire Haddad

Octavius Thompson, St Lawrence Hall, 1867. Courtesy of Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. Edited via [https://www.flickr.com/photos/thomasfisherlibrary/30865104186/in/album-72157672729106183/]

Julie Yoo’s meticulously curated I Miss You Vintage has grown from a low-key opening in 2006 to a place where Lady Gaga shops. Tommy Ton, the pioneering street style photographer, had his fashion epiphany as an Oakville teen watching Fashion Television. Feminist artist and curator Petra Collins, a Toronto native and former OCADU student, shoots campaigns for Adidas and Gucci, and Romanian-born Lucian Matis, who “[came] to Canada to study fashion,”* is dressing Sophie Grégoire Trudeau. Erdem Moralıoğlu may have left the city for London, but Jeremy Laing is back in his Parkdale studio.

So strong is the local industry that last year when Toronto Fashion Week got dumped by its corporate owner, the mood in the aftermath was more festive than grim. In fact, if Susan Langdon has her way, the country could finally get a Canadian Fashion Council.

The original logo for the Unicorn, the first boutique opened by Marilyn Brooks in the early 1960s. Copyright 2017 Marilyn Brooks www.marilynbrooks.com

Toronto Fashion Week is dead.

Long live Toronto Fashion Week.

**Source: Toronto Life Q&A, March 2016.*

Top Comrags, Spring 1986. Photo: Chris Nicholls for Now Magazine. Courtesy of Comrags / Chris Nicholls.

Corner Detail of print on CN Tower Jumpsuit, ca. 1976, Ryerson Fashion Research Collection FRC2014.99.003, Anonymous donation. Photo by Jazmin Welch. Image courtesy of Ryerson University.

BottomGarden party fashion show hosted by Eaton's, 1930. Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives.