

DRESSING MEXICO

FASHION DESIGN TODAY

Juan Carlos Rojas Larrondo*

In the early 1970s, Mexico City's centrally-located Pink Zone was considered the most glamorous place for women to go for the latest in fashion. Armando Valdés Peza and María Victoria Díaz, "the queen of hats," were the most renowned Mexican designers, and between the two of them, they dressed both celebrities and society ladies. White and silver predominated in women's clothes, and mini-skirts began to cause a sensation on the streets of Mexico's great capital.

More than 40 years have passed since the Golden Age of Mexico's textile industry, and society ladies have moved on from the heart of the city toward the high fashion boutiques on Masaryk, one of the most emblematic streets in the Polanco neighborhood. Chanel, Salvatore Ferragamo, Cartier, Louis Vuitton, and Rosa Clará are just some of the foreign firms that decorate the avenue, where one very important thing is glaringly absent: a store offering 100-percent-Mexican clothing. What follows is a taste of the panorama of what the fashion industry in our country is experiencing.

A WAVE OF TALENT

Beginning in 2000, the evolution of Internet made promoting Mexican design more agile, facilitating dialogue among those interested in the topic.

"Technology and all the communication tools have meant that we're all aware of what's happening around the world when it happens. This makes the consumer more demanding,

* Mexican historian and writer.



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and fashion is no exception," says Beatriz Calles, the director of the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Mexico, one of the country's most important fashion platforms, whose central aim is to showcase fashion, creating alliances to benefit everyone. "We've achieved a great deal, but the main advance is having strengthened the image of the designers that are part of our platform and considerably improving their businesses," explains Calles. "Today we are the strongest fashion platform in the national fashion system. When a season ends, the whole team meets to evaluate our successes and correct our mistakes. That's how we've grown," she adds.

For Calles, what the national industry needs most to flourish is greater acceptance by Mexican consumers. Some of the designers participating today in the shows are Julia y Renata, Alexia Ulibarri, Alejandro Carlín, JI+B, Royal Closet,



MACARIO JIMÉNEZ
MÉXICO



ALEJANDRO CARLÍN

“What’s important is to keep working on success stories so that fashion and its industry have more and more space in the domestic economy and can also compete with other countries.” Pamela Wong

Macario Jiménez, Lorena Saravi, Lydia Lavín, and the company Pink Magnolia. Pamela Wong, Pink Magnolia’s sales director, is sure that this kind of space helps the national clothing industry to advance much more visibly. “What’s important is to keep working on success stories so that fashion and its industry have more and more space in the domestic economy and can also compete with other countries.”

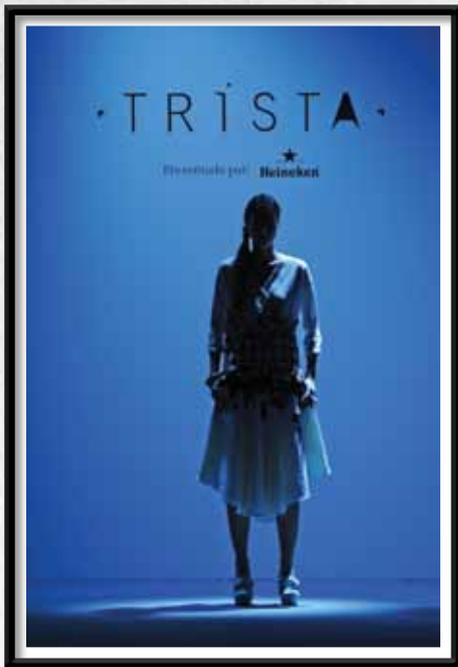
NEW PLATFORMS

Compra Moda Nacional (CMN)

“So Mexicans can be dressed in Mexico,” is the slogan of CMN (*Compra Moda Nacional*, or “Buy Domestic Fashion” in English), the first on-line store that carries the best posi-

tioned designers in Mexico. Its aim: to promote their creations and generate greater interaction with consumers.

“We loyally believe in Mexican fashion’s potential; that’s why we get up every day to create projects, promote and sell the best pieces of the best quality in the country,” says Cris Paglieri, a *Compra Moda Nacional* account executive. Paglieri is in charge of organizing events, dealing with clients, and staying in direct contact with participating designers. Alejandro Carlín, Julia y Renata, Malafacha, Delia González, Adriana Soto, José María Torre Hütt, Clara González, and Sandra Weill are some of the creators who offer their products on CMN, which has different platforms: a PopUp Store, an itinerant store that sets up in different malls throughout the country; a Fashion Fair, which lasts one day; and the Fashion Market W, featuring the latest trends.



·TRISTA·



CARLA FERNÁNDEZ

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INTERMODA

The International Fashion Exhibition in Mexico was first held in Guadalajara, Jalisco, almost 30 years ago. It is held twice a year, in January and July, and its aim is to bring together fashion industry proposals both from Mexico and abroad.

This expo already has international positioning, attracting more than 20 000 buyers and visitors and the participation of 700 national and international exhibitors with a total of 1 380 stands. Admission is free, but exclusively for buyers with an invitation; it takes up 36 000 square meters of floor space at the Expo Guadalajara venue. Some participating countries are Portugal, Spain, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, India, the United States, South Korea, and

Chile. It also offers lectures and a series of international runway shows to promote fashion as a profitable business in Mexico.

“MADE IN MEXICO”: MEXICAN DESIGNERS WITH AN INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

Rolando Santana

Together with Ricardo Seco, Rolando Santana is considered one of the most important designers on the international fashion scene. Born in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Ricardo has been living for more than 20 years in New York, where he first worked with firms like Donna Morgan and Spenser Jeremy.



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In 2009, he began to create his own collection. Today, his house sells pieces in more than 100 stores in the United States and presents its new proposals during New York's Fashion Week. His designs are sober and elegant, and black always features prominently, as well as fringes and vaporous skirts.

Ricardo Seco

Born in Torreón, Coahuila, before venturing into fashion, Ricardo Seco had already spent 12 years in business. After that, he decided to leave his native city to study in Milan and Paris. Later, he became the creative director of the sports shoe company Converse. He has been the star designer of the fashion weeks in Colombia, Miami, and, since last year, New York. His fabric of preference is soft cotton, followed by leather, suede, and wool. His combinations mix traditional Mexican elements and those of other cultures with contemporary touches. For example, in one of his most recent collections, he presented 22 pieces inspired in the look of classical Orthodox

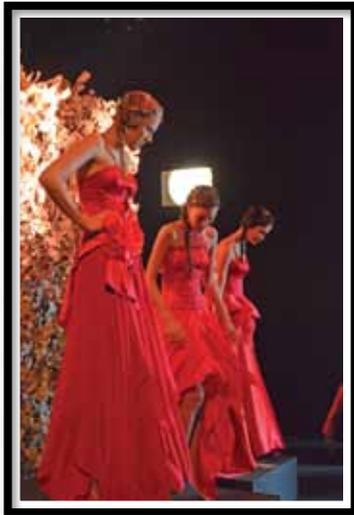
Jews: long coats and wide-cut white shirts merged with leggings and even animal prints.

Alejandro Carlín

Carlín has participated in festivals like the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Mexico, Colombia Fashion, and the International Fashion Week in Madrid. Born in Mexico City, he moved to Milan to study fashion and pattern design. On his return in 2003, he moved to Monterrey, Nuevo León, where he founded the Lola de Alejandro brand, and, in 2011, launched the luxury line that bears his name, specialized in evening gowns. Organic forms, basic colors like black, white, and copper, silk, wool, and crepe are some of the traits that have distinguished his latest productions.

Jesús Ibarra + Bertholdo

This year, the JI+B brand is celebrating its tenth anniversary. Its two founders, Jesús Ibarra and Bertholdo Espinoza



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are both architects by training. Like Alejandro Carlín, their initial specialty was evening and cocktail dresses. In 2010, they participated in Berlin's Fashion Week and were well received by European critics. The JI+B Blue Blood 2013 Fall/Winter Collection was one of the most brilliant lines of this year's Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Mexico.

Their most recent collection, Blue Blood, is an allusion to the bourgeoisie before the French Revolution, where every detail was important: long, sheer dresses and geographic designs, blouses, and pants.

Short or long dresses, blouses, jackets, and pants made of silk, velvet, Chantilly lace, and leather, plus embroidery with Swarovski crystal are just some of the characteristics of their work.

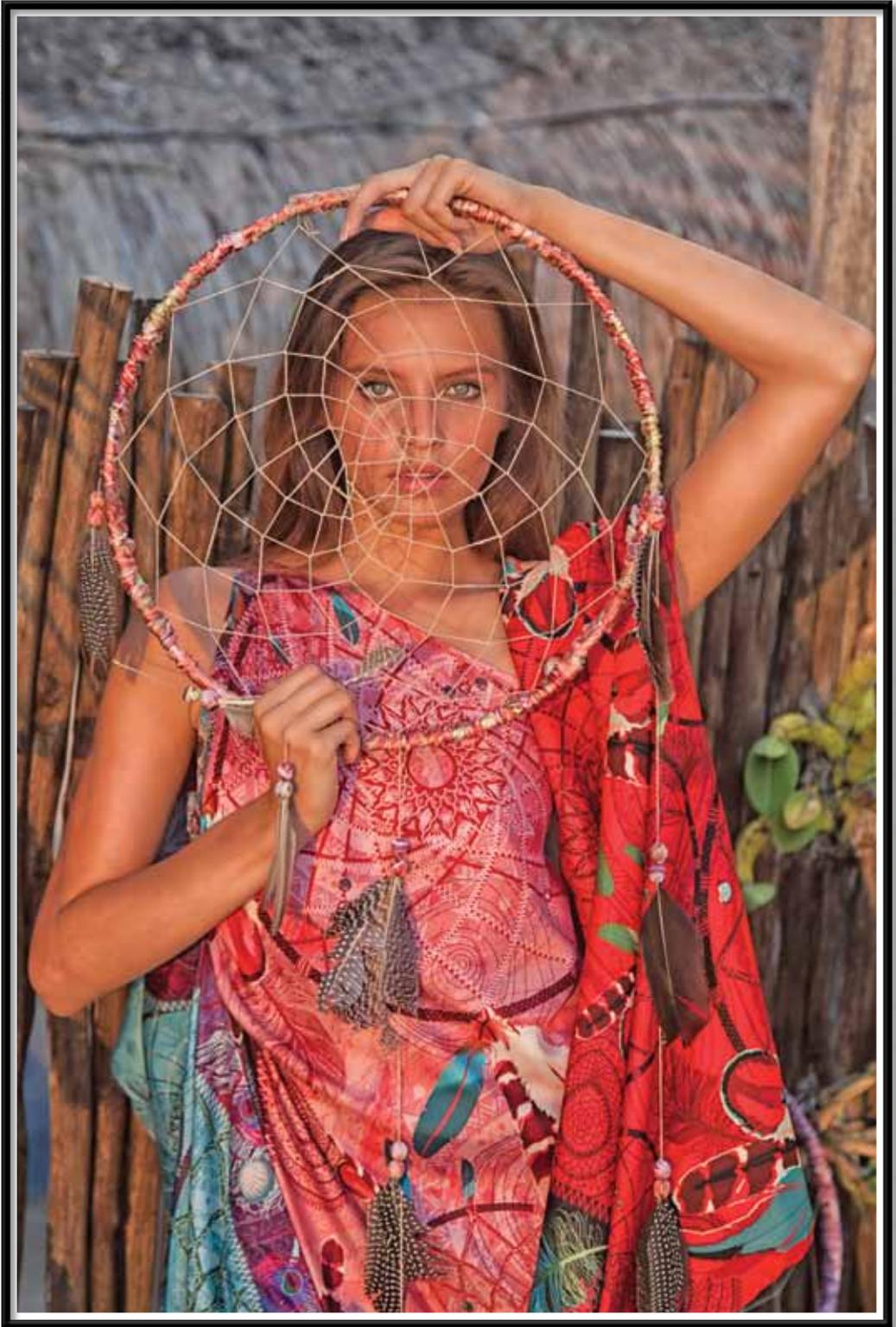
Trista

In all, its founders have presented nine collections since they opened their house. Graduates of Fashion House of France

Institute of Higher Learning, Giovanni Estrada, with partial studies in architecture, and José Alfredo Silva, who also did undergraduate work in industrial engineering with a specialty in fashion research, have been to countries like Colombia, Brazil, Spain, and Japan. The two designers are the national talents who created this firm, which today has a luxury line and another of more accessible clothing, Simple by Trista, with their particular style. Their last collection was inspired by cacao, with a range of colors varying in hues of grey. They use cotton, denim, and torn fabrics, and have lines for both men and women.

Julia y Renata

One of these designers' main characteristics is that each piece is unique and a-seasonal. Originally from Guadalajara, Jalisco, they launched their firm 15 years ago, and have presented their creations on important runways like the Cibeles in Madrid and the Los Angeles Fashion Week, as well as in Croatia and



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Greece. Designs for avant-garde women who want to experiment make up their collections, with a preference for silk and cotton as the star fabrics for each of their pieces.

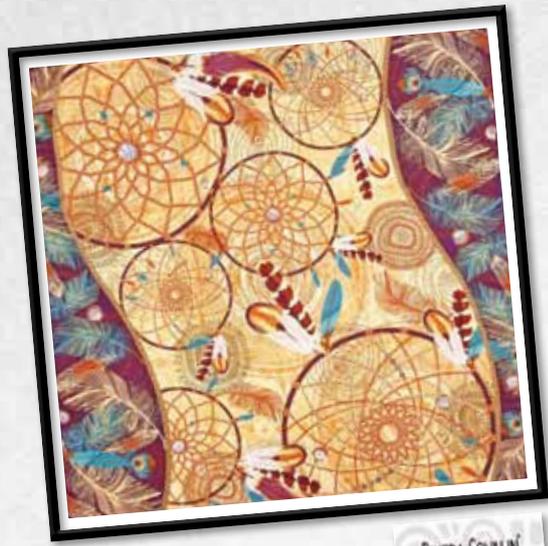
Macario Jiménez

The star designer of Mexico’s presidential residence, Los Pinos, dressed the former first lady, Margarita Zavala during the administration of President Felipe Calderón. Macario is now also designing the look for the current first lady, Angélica Rivera. With more than 25 years’ experience in Mexican fashion, he has participated in fashion platforms in countries like Puerto Rico, Yugoslavia, Colombia, Italy, and the United States. Since Jiménez’s collections are inspired in nature, the earth, flowers, and the sea are often some of the elements used

allegorically in his luxury dresses, known for being made of fabrics like organdy, cotton, wool, and satin.

Kris Goyri

Originally from Mexico City, Kris Goyri is perhaps one of the youngest designers dreaming of the national fashion scene. He graduated in 2007 from the Fashion House of France Institute of Higher Learning and began designing ready-to-wear women’s clothing, which taught him about fabrics and textures. At 22, in 2008, he won the “Mexico Designs” contest organized by the women’s magazine *ELLE*. In 2009, he received a scholarship to study in Barcelona and then returned to Mexico City determined to make it. His proposals are characterized by his use of neutral colors like white, grey and



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raw linen, and by his trims in crepes, chiffons, and sequins. He has dressed celebrities like Miranda Kerr, Julieta Venegas, Ely Guerra, and Kika Edgar.

Carla Fernández

The designer and founder of Taller Flora (Flora's Atelier), a clothing brand and mobile laboratory that travels all over Mexico visiting indigenous communities, has developed a fair-trade business model that protects both the environment and Mexican traditions. Her work has been shown at London's and New York's Fashion Week, Expo Shanghai 2010, and Paris's Ethical Fashion Show, among other important platforms. Carla's first job was with the National Council for the Arts (Conaculta) and the National Fund for Promoting the Arts (Fonart), fostering design and the development of

artisanal techniques and the indigenous communities. She used her studies in art history to create a 100-percent Mexican-owned firm that uses fabrics like denim and silk. All her pieces are hand-made by Mexican artisans, and she uses them to emphasize the country's aesthetic values.

Pineda Covalín

Cristina Pineda and Ricardo Covalín first conceived of their firm in 1996 as part of a National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) project. But what began as a student project is today one of Mexico's most renowned brands, with a presence on four continents: North and South America, Europe, and Asia. In addition, it has a franchising model to show that the clothing industry is also good business. Their emblems are ties and scarves, which show the country's cul-



ALEJANDRO CARLÍN



J+B
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tural wealth with inspired prints, for example, of the flight of the Monarch butterfly or Mayan and Mexica symbols. The firm has eight of its own shops tucked in the corners of department stores and in countries like Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Spain, France, Japan, the United States and Canada.

THE NEXT STEP

In this vast array of Mexican fashion design, there is a little of everything: from designers who try to feature typically Mexican aesthetic reference points to those who reinterpret the essence of the national culture and express it discreetly in their designs or their fabrics. But while the enormous talent and creativity of newcomers and respected old hands alike is very clear, in Mex-

ico, we still have only an incipient fashion industry, where designers, consumers, and investors all bring their efforts to bear.

For fashion expert Carlota de la Vega, more and more people are working to foster and support this market. “The Mexican consumer has begun to place a little more value on design and brands in our country. He or she has become more aware of national brands thanks to having access to all kinds of information. For that reason, she/he demands consistency between value and price.” De la Vega adds that a great deal of talent exists, but still not enough bases for business or distribution channels. “That’s why designers have to have not only solid creative grounding, but also be knowledgeable in business administration. It’s important to know that in addition to being a life passion, fashion is a business worth exploring more deeply.” **NM**