

GENLUX

MAGAZINE



HAYDEN PANETTIERE

FRESH SUMMER FASHION:
TAKE A BITE!

Fashion+Beauty+Shopping!



ROZAE NICHOLS: THE STRONG, QUIET TYPE

BY TARA TYSON



S

he may be petite, and soft-spoken to the point of self-deprecation, even. But when it comes to designing clothes, Rozae Nichols is quite a force. Known mostly for her feminine dresses and well-shaped jackets, she's tossed more fashion balls in the air than any other L.A.-based designer. And they all land well.

"I LOVE ELEMENTS IN GARMENTS THAT FEEL ALMOST TEXTURAL. IF I COULD, I'D MAKE WOOD VENEERS AND CHAIN-LINK FENCE INTO CLOTHING."

Not only does she release two fall and two spring collections each year under the heading of her Rozae Nichols line, she also creates annual holiday, resort, and summer collections. Then there's A Common Thread, "the little sister to the main collection," as Nichols affectionately refers to it, her two-year-old venture with businessman and former accessory designer Tony Graham. And as if that weren't enough to juggle, last year Nichols and Graham launched R.N. Convertible, a line born out of the jersey and knitwear pieces in the Rozae Nichols line. "Designing the collections of three lines is hard, because you have to create so much so quickly," Nichols admitted during our recent conversation at Findings, her downtown L.A. showroom. But having worked for other designers in the late 1980s and early 90s, she appears to genuinely enjoy being the sole progenitor of so many projects. "Designers strive to create their own vision as opposed to just designing for different houses," she says. "I felt really ready to express my voice." And express it she does—in all its myriad forms. The through-line? A soft, flowing fit, hints of both retro and modernity, and wearable pretty clothes that a woman of literally any age can feel perfect in. No wonder she sells so well at stores like Neiman Marcus Beverly Hills, Saks, Barneys, Fred Segal, Madison, Lisa Kline, Polkadots and Moonbeams, Ron Herman, Lily Savitch, and Planet Blue.

Possessing a "utilitarian aesthetic," Nichols is greatly inspired by her background in graphic design and art. "I'm a little obsessed with circles and squares," she admits, and the fall 2007 collection of her eponymous line is a testament to this infatuation: an evening coat made entirely from a single circular piece of fabric; camisoles with shiny yet understated paillette detailing; an almost elliptical red cropped leather jacket that was inspired by the shape of a

football and which Nichols describes as "a sort of horizontal cocoon." The sleek profiles Nichols executes and her attention to how clothes fit a body seem to originate in her personal style ("I'm very sporty, very clean, almost menswear") balanced with her interest in making classical, feminine, pretty pieces—a nexus she credits to "my twin obsessions: technique and cut."

Nichols is a native of Los Angeles, but her clothes incorporate both an L.A. aesthetic and a worldly one—in part, perhaps, because she's so influenced by local fashion in other parts of the world. "I've traveled a lot," she says, "and I love the ways people on the street wear the most disparate combinations of garments—the ingenuity of people around the world without money who still manage to create beauty."

After studying at Pasadena's Art Center College of Design, she worked for a sportswear company in the 1980s, developing prints and traveling frequently to Asia and Europe, and then moved to Paris to develop *Autour du Monde's* first collection. A year later she returned to L.A. and began working with women's sportswear designer Harriet Selwyn, whom she credits with helping her develop an aesthetic and teaching her how to create a business. In 1993, she struck out on her own and launched Rozae Nichols. The intricate design of her dresses—using bits of lace, tulle and unusual prints—stuck out as slightly bohemian but very wearable.

Not one to concern herself with trends, Nichols tends to stay ahead of them by following her own aesthetic judgment. "I know metallic is really important right now," she explains, showing us a silver jersey dress from R.N. Convertible. "But for me, it's always important. I love elements in garments that feel almost textural. If I could, I'd make wood veneers and chain-link fence into clothing." This affinity for tactile pieces corresponds to Nichols's intention for her designs as well as her fabrics to endure. "Even though the garments appear to have a certain preciousness," she says, "they're also pretty strong." The same could be said of this woman who juggles eleven collections a year—all of them lovely. ☐

