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AUSTIN ●

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● PORTLAND, ORE.

UNITED STATES OF Style

More Main Street than
Fifth Avenue, these trend-
setters find inspiration
beyond the fashion capitals

BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON WITMER

WHEN IT COMES TO COUTURE, New York City reigns supreme. In fact, Global Language Monitor, a data-research company that tracks worldwide trends, ranked the Big Apple as the No. 1 world fashion capital for 2014. Even so, some fashion designers choose to live and work far from big-city runways. These women prove that style and creativity can flourish anywhere, regardless of the ZIP code. ►



MAKAYLAA. WRAY PITTSBURGH

COMPANY: MAW **AGE:** 23 **EDUCATION:** The Art Institute of Pittsburgh **ONLINE STORE:** makaylaawray.com

WHEN MOST GIRLS were donning frilly white dresses for First Communion, Makayla A. Wray wore a white suit and a gold chain. “Everyone else was like, ‘Why is she wearing that?’ and I was absolutely happy,” she says. “I just felt so powerful. That’s what I want when people wear my clothes — to feel powerful and not to wear them for anyone else but themselves.”

Wray’s confidence, independence and envelope-pushing style have become hallmarks of her already impressive career. At 23, she’s worked as a stylist on a Wiz Khalifa music video, designed custom apparel for clients, created a T-shirt line and landed on the cover of the *Pittsburgh City Paper*. Her debut collection for her label MAW launches this fall, just after she graduates from The Art Institute of Pittsburgh.

Her designs feature bold, oversized, feminized versions of masculine silhouettes in wool, leather and cotton. The gritty Steel City has provided Wray with plenty of inspiration. The arches found in Pittsburgh’s architecture and the city’s famous bridges have made an appearance in her collection, for instance.

“Pittsburgh is very strong, it’s very industrial and it has so many different textures,” she says. “I like working in some things that are smooth and putting them together with something way more hard, and tying them together to be one.” »

Makayla A. Wray, above left, grew up in Pittsburgh and draws inspiration from the city. Her style mixes street wear with couture.



COURTESY OF MAKAYLA A. WRAY

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Fans of Alyson Clair, center left, love her vintage flair and sense of humor. She calls one design the “no muffin top” skirt.



ALYSON CLAIR

PORTLAND, ORE.

COMPANY: Clair Vintage Inspired **AGE:** 33 **EDUCATION:** The Art Institute of Portland **ONLINE STORE:** alysonclair.com

GROWING UP ON a llama farm in Oregon wine country, Alyson Clair was exposed to textiles at an early age. Her mother carded wool in the basement and dried yarn in the bathroom. Still, Clair didn’t know she wanted to make clothes until she was 22, during a visit to The Art Institute of Portland.

After graduating from the school, Clair launched her Portland company, Clair Vintage Inspired, creating dresses that conjure the styles of the 1920s through the 1960s. Each of her designs comes in a range of sizes, and the classic retro silhouettes flatter any body. “I want to make sure that for a woman who’s an extra-small and a woman who’s a 3XL, the dress looks the same and looks awesome on both of them,” she says.

Clair is quick to call herself a dressmaker instead of a fashion designer, and wants her clothing to be accessible and well-loved. “Everyone has a favorite outfit that they feel like a million bucks in,” she says. “I want women to say, ‘This is my favorite dress,’ and put it on and feel totally awesome.”

Although Clair often has to travel to buy fabric, Portland’s garment factories allow her to make her clothes locally, which many designers are unable to do. Roughly 97 percent of clothing sold in the U.S. is made overseas, according to the American Apparel & Footwear Association.

“Everything I make is made here in Portland,” Clair says. “We have manufacturing here, and I want to use it.” »



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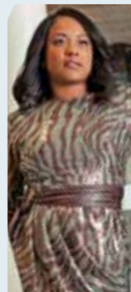
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TIPS TO TAP INTO YOUR CREATIVE SIDE, WHEREVER YOU LIVE

► SEE INSPIRATION EVERYWHERE.

Tashia Senn gets her creative juices flowing by visiting art museums, observing the costuming at theater performances, watching old movies and taking regular train trips to New York City to browse in fabric stores.



► DO YOUR OWN THING.

To get into “the zone,” Catherine Cottingham turns on her favorite music and wears her wildest and most-loved clothing. “I try to channel the part of me that’s happiest and most creative and doesn’t care what anybody else thinks,” she says.



► KEEP YOUR TOOLS HANDY.

Makayla A. Wray always carries her sketchbook, a pen and a pair of scissors so she can design any time, anywhere. She uses her smartphone camera to snap and save inspiring images.



► DON’T BE AFRAID TO START.

You don’t have to have been a lifelong artist to begin a creative pursuit. The important thing is to just start knitting, painting, writing or whatever endeavor you choose. “It’s never too late to start being creative,” says Alyson Clair.



COURTESY CATHERINE COTTINGHAM



CATHERINE COTTINGHAM AUSTIN

COMPANY: Catherine Nicole **AGE:** 34 **EDUCATION:** Parsons The New School for Design, New York City
ONLINE STORE: catherinenicole.com

CATHERINE COTTINGHAM THINKS jewelry does more than adorn: It tells a story.

“In a lot of cultures, their jewelry tells more about who they are than their apparel,” she says. “As far as the consumer here goes, it can be the same thing. It’s usually a gift from a loved one or something that’s special to you or moves you in some way.”

Cottingham’s designs are largely inspired by her six years living in Spain, with its elegant, bohemian aesthetic and distinct Moorish/Moroccan influences. “I consider my jewelry statement jewelry,” she says. “It’s meant to make you feel special and like you’re telling the world something about yourself by wearing it.”

Cottingham learned how to make jewelry from a bench jeweler (someone who makes and repairs jewelry) in Savannah, Ga., after graduating from Parsons in New York City. Following a yearlong cross-country trek

in an Airstream to introduce herself and her designs to boutique owners, she and her husband settled in Austin. Since then, she’s won the city’s People’s Choice Award for Best Designer and created a capsule collection for W Hotels.

Although finding materials often requires travel, Cottingham’s happy working in relaxed, arty Austin. “It’s a fun place to be and a fun place to be creative,” she says.

And her business is about more than just beautiful baubles. She donates \$5 from every purchase to the philanthropy BRAC to teach entrepreneurial skills and provide micro-

loans to young women in Uganda. “Being a fashion designer,” she says, “I needed to find a way to make that not just about what we wear but to also be doing something helpful.” »

Jeweler Catherine Cottingham, left, gives many of her pieces female names. Pictured at top, from left, Annie earrings, Jasmine necklace and Natalie bracelet.



Tashia Senn, center left, runs a nonprofit, SAVVY GIRL, that mentors young women in an effort to transform their lives by involving them in the fashion industry.



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TASHIA SENN

WASHINGTON, D.C.

COMPANY: Tashia Senn **AGE:** 36 **EDUCATION:** Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City
ONLINE STORE: tashiasenn.com

AS A CHILD, Tashia Senn dressed up in her mother’s clothes, ogled her grandmother’s glamorous style and organized fashion shows in high school. She enrolled in the Fashion Institute of Technology at age 27, spending four years in New York City before coming home to Washington, D.C., to launch her line.

While most of Senn’s customers wear her garments to typical D.C. functions — galas, charity events, cocktail parties — the District’s style has evolved from its once carbon-copy, monochromatic aesthetic, she says: “People here aren’t just wearing blues, grays or just black suits anymore. They’re becoming more bold with color and texture. At one time, everybody looked the same, but it’s not like that anymore.”

In addition to dressing D.C., Senn has designed a Grammy gown for singer Ledisi and participated in several BET fashion shows, including one in which her 80-year-old grandmother walked the runway wearing one of Senn’s designs. And now, her newest collection will feature designs for the youngest fashionistas, inspired by and named for her 1-year-old daughter Zoë Renee.

The bygone decades of the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s speak most to Senn, and they’re reflected in her designs: elegant evening and cocktail wear in silk, chiffon and charmeuse, with a modern twist. “I love the whole femininity of that era,” she says. “You have to stay on trend for certain things, but if it’s not broke, why fix it?” ●



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