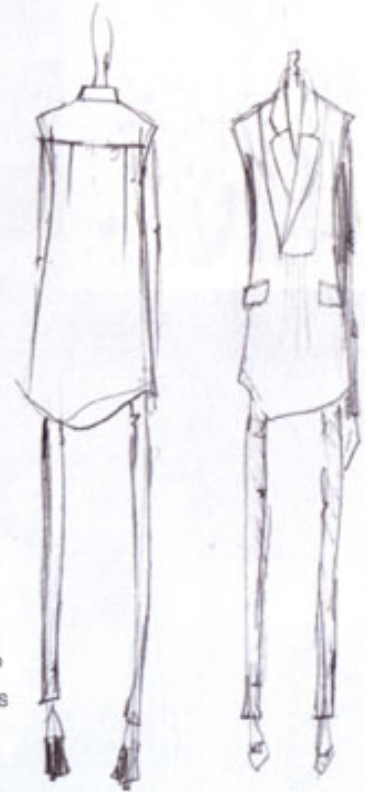


AT THE BEAVER CAFE
ON QUEEN WEST, LAING'S
FAVOURITE HANGOUT

DRESSING UP
AND LAYING LOW

39
FASHION FILE



THE DESIGNER'S LATEST COLLECTION, LAUNCHED DURING NEW YORK FASHION WEEK, INCLUDES UNIFORMS THAT WILL BE WORN BY ATTENDANTS AT THE ART GALLERY OF YORK UNIVERSITY

JEREMY LAING MAY BE TAKING THE NEW YORK FASHION WORLD BY STORM, BUT HIS HEART BELONGS TO PARKDALE

Jeremy Laing winces a little when asked about his success. But with an internship at Alexander McQueen in London and several New York fashion shows on his resumé, it's hard to describe him as anything but. The 27-year-old fashion designer who calls Parkdale home is only just beginning. Laing's ambitions are grand – he tosses out phrases like “market penetration” and “operating on an international level” – but he prefers to live far from the gilded halls of high fashion.

He's more attracted to the “quiet and sober approach,” meaning, sans the usual celebrity circus wranglings. He is openly critical of the runway shenanigans that many young and attention-seeking designers indulge in, such as having models walk the catwalk dressed like Inuit of the Amazon. (“Yes, it happened, apparently, from what you see on the runway,” says Laing wryly.)

From that perspective it makes perfect sense that he is often spotted dining at Queen West's popular lunch counter the Beaver Café. Keeping himself firmly rooted in Parkdale affords Laing plenty of opportunity to stay involved in the local scene and make a name for himself that extends beyond a rack of

clothes at Holt Renfrew (next to the likes of Marni and Marc Jacobs). The costume designer for the Toronto Dance Theatre, Laing's indie-darling credentials stem from his involvement in such collaborative projects as a performance sewing circle and Pavilion of Virginia Puff-Paint, a performance installation that has since become a book with the assistance of the Art Gallery of York University. Last fall, the AGYU sponsored his spring/summer 2007 show in New York. In exchange, his latest adventure sees the AGYU gallery attendants garbed in Laing's vision of Soviet drab – a take on the Russian constructivist proletariat, which he describes as “playing off the idea of gallery staff being manufacturers of the contact with the work.” Think greys and khakis, although Laing promises that he “might spice it up a little.”

Which could really mean just about anything. In 2005, Laing accessorized his jackets with braided hair. Now he's looking at fitting high-tech Italian fabrics into his favoured natural fibres. “I like surprising blends of linen and wool, or wool and silk, with their iconic properties,” he explains. His taste for vintage charm has also led him to work with a tiny mill in Queens, where the 50-year-old machinery gives the fabric the “old-world quality” he's noted for. The mill's invoices come out of a typewriter, and next visit, he's been promised corned beef sandwiches “at Jackie Gleason's favourite place.” A fitting adventure for an international designer with his heart firmly set on the quirks of local living.

BY LEA ZELTSERMAN