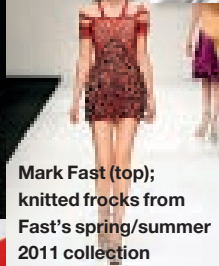
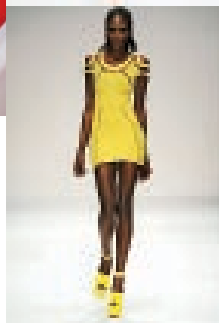


Montreal designer Thomas Tait; mock-up of Tait's look book; a Tait-clad model (right)



Mark Fast (top); knitted frocks from Fast's spring/summer 2011 collection



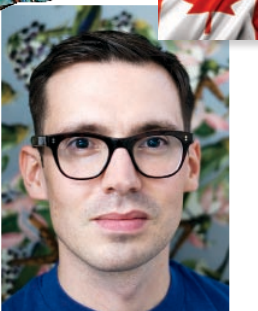
{THE NEW DESIGNERS}

LONDON CALLING

The latest British fashion revival features a Canadian invasion. TEXT: IMRAN AMED



Fall/winter 2010 dresses from Erdem Moralioglu



It's official: London fashion is hot again. There's London Fashion Week's new home at the historic Somerset House, the return of Jonathan Saunders, Burberry and Matthew Williamson to the official show schedule and a slew of creative young designers joining their ranks. What is perhaps less well known is that Canadians are playing an instrumental role in London's latest fashion renaissance.

It was only when James Wright, Canadian high commissioner to the United Kingdom, and his wife, Donna Thomson, invited me to dinner to celebrate the success of Canadians in London's fashion industry this past summer that I realized the full extent of the quiet Canadian fashion revolution going on in London. Case in point: Erdem Moralioglu of Montreal has quietly become one of the most highly anticipated designers to show during London Fashion Week, having famously dressed both Samantha Cameron, wife of the new British prime minister, and Sarah Brown, wife of the former British prime minister, just as their husbands were gearing up for this year's fiercely contested election campaign. Not to be outdone by the Brits, the United States' First Lady, Michelle Obama, has worn Erdem too, as have countless young Hollywood starlets, fashion editors and buyers around the world.

But Erdem isn't the only Canadian making waves: After dinner, I chatted with Toronto's Todd Lynn about the surprise appearance of Janet Jackson at his fall/winter 2010 show during London Fashion Week in February. It seems that Jackson was so enamoured with the sleek, modern tailoring she sported in her "Make Me" video, she voluntarily hopped on a plane to London expressly to show her support from Lynn's front row. The Canadian connection doesn't end there: Mark Fast, a native Winnipegger, is making his name as London's reigning knitwear innovator, and Montreal's Jean-Pierre Braganza has built a cult following among fashionistas for his graphic prints and razor-sharp tailoring. ▷

The next generation of London talent is already showing Canadian links: Thomas Tait, another Montrealer, graduated from London's renowned Central Saint Martins (CSM) this year to rave reviews. He was selected from a very competitive pool of applicants as a finalist for the Dorchester Collection Fashion Prize (to be awarded in November), whose illustrious jury—including Manolo Blahnik and Daphne Guinness—is chaired by yet another Canadian: fashion writer Bronwyn Cosgrave.

So, what explains this U.K.-inspired Canadian fashion movement? "I think this primarily has to do with education, as all of us who are successful studied at Central Saint Martins or the Royal College of Art [RCA]," says Moralioglu, a star graduate of the RCA in 2003. "The training in London is second to none." Braganza agrees. "When I was in college in Toronto, the creativity coming out of London was mind-blowing, so I had to go to Saint Martins," he says. "And London is the city that best absorbs my dark, psychedelic, future-historic style. I'm always challenged here."

Indeed, all of the young Canadian designers shaking up fashion in London first arrived as students. "London is incredibly supportive of new talent," says Lynn, who came to the city 10 years ago to take the Central Saint Martins M.A. under legendary course director Louise Wilson. "Everything kicked off a few years ago."

For Lynn, Moralioglu and others, the various programs in London that provide financial and operational support have enabled the designers to continue developing their own design signatures. Moralioglu, in particular, has been a recipient of such support right from the start, winning the Fashion Fringe prize, followed by the Swarovski British Fashion Council (BFC) Fashion Enterprise Award, the BFC Fashion Forward

Award and the inaugural BFC/Vogue Fashion Fund Award.

"I think success stories motivate others to chase after their dreams," offers Tait, who had watched Canadians like Moralioglu and Lynn make it big in London. Now, his own success is having the same effect. "I remember that, when I moved from Montreal to London, I was the only graduating student at LaSalle College who was applying for the M.A. program at CSM. The following year, I was told by the college staff that a flood of Canadians applied for further education—many of whom had chosen CSM."

As for the dinner at the Canadian High Commission, "It was nice to sit back and see everyone share stories," says Tait. As we stumbled out of the high commissioner's residence after midnight, well fed and brimming with conversation and a rare bit of national pride, Moralioglu called out, "Do you guys want to grab a drink?" A few minutes later, we were tucked around a table at the David Collins-designed Connaught Bar, exchanging fashion war stories. And nothing warmed my little Canadian heart more than to see Moralioglu passing on a few words of wisdom to Tait on how to set up a business, the struggles he had from the start and what it took to become successful. "Erdem has been extremely kind and given me



From top: A Todd Lynn runway look from spring/summer 2011; Todd Lynn; a spring/summer 2011 dress by Jean-Pierre Braganza

some great advice," says Tait. It was this exchange that perhaps offered another explanation as to how this quiet Canadian fashion revolution has happened, with a group of creatives navigating the tough waters of the fashion business, inspiring others to come to London and helping one another learn the ropes: It's the Canadian way. ▷

Imran Amed is the founder and editor of businessoffashion.com. He grew up in Calgary and is now based in London, England.



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