



Refined Style

GREG MADESKER's respect for fine clothing makes him one of Harry Rosen's most successful salesmen.

By JOHN MACKAY PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMMA MCINTYRE

HIS TITLE IS FASHION DIRECTOR of luxury and designer collections, but his many clients at the Harry Rosen store on Bloor Street in Toronto know him simply as one of the best menswear salesmen in the business, the guy they turn to for anything to do with clothes and style. For most of his professional life, Greg Madesker has been buying, selling and merchandising menswear, these last four years for Harry Rosen, where he sells somewhere in the vicinity of \$2 million a year.

There have been two great Harrys in Canadian menswear retail, and Madesker has been employed by both. In 1988 he began working for Harry Bendayan, whose artful shop, Marc Laurent, defined a pared-down, refined, easy but exacting approach to dressing, which Madesker adopted as his own. "Harry Bendayan taught me to respect

the product and how to handle it and show it," he says. "I absolutely absorbed his passion for fine clothing."

Where Bendayan helped him refine his taste and attitude, Harry Rosen has given Madesker the opportunity to grow as a buyer and a businessman operating on a much larger scale. Now, he travels to New York and Europe as a part of the Rosen buying team. "This company sets the standard for customer service," he says. "It's the Olympics of menswear, the major leagues. I'm surrounded by people who are talented in their chosen profession. It makes you work harder."

On the day we meet for lunch, Madesker is wearing a deconstructed, single-breasted Armani Black Label navy seersucker jacket, a white Jil Sander shirt, navy Jil Sander cotton piqué trousers and black Converse All Star high-tops. It's classic Madesker, and a way of dressing that could be described more generically as "understated elegance." The absence of detail draws the eye to the cut, the cloth, the finish. It's a highly confident interpretation of men's style, and his customers rely on it.

What do men want? "What I tell them they want," Madesker laughs before offering a more thoughtful analysis of the selling experience. "I try to understand their daily lives, get a sense of who they are. And I get a sense of what they want to feel like in their clothes. It's intuitive. Meanwhile, our inventory is flying through my head."

Later, in the store, I watch him take a jacket from the rack, cradle it in his arms and sweep it out perfectly on a table. What sounds precious is instead respectful, reflecting his reverence for fine clothing. "Feel this," he says, brushing his fingers lightly over the fabric of an Isaia suit. "Feel this," he says again and again as we walk through the store.

Of his point of view, he says, not immodestly, "I have a certain aesthetic, a certain sensibility. I'm influenced by exceptional, understated clothing, and I can communicate that. When I'm working, I don't see it as selling customers a product. I try to show them beautiful things and impart my appreciation." ■



Talkin' 'Bout My Generation

JESAR GABINO, co-owner of Nomad, on the new breed of menswear consumer. By JOHN MACKAY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER WAHL

WHEN I MEET JESAR GABINO AT NOMAD, his Toronto store, he's sweeping the floor while his partners clean out the basement. That's retail for you. Nomad is one of the country's most forward-thinking menswear ventures and Gabino is its creative director and head buyer, but his day-to-day work is not always glamorous.

Nor does Gabino play the star. He would rather talk about the store than himself, and he prefers "we" to "I," eager to be sure I understand that the store is a partnership. After former ventures that included shops called Stussy and Goodfoot, he and his partners Zeb Munir and Matt George opened Nomad in 2005. The store, he says, speaks to a

generation of men now in their 30s who, like him, grew up under the influence of hip hop and skate cultures with their strong emphasis on style. "Nomad is the shop that completed the thought for us," he explains.

Gabino has a kind of easy assurance, as do Nomad and its customers. The guys who wander through have an unabashed interest in fashion. They know what they're looking at and what they're looking for. It doesn't occur to them not to mix styles, and Nomad, where heritage brands are racked with gentrified hip-hop looks and handcrafted pieces, suits their confidence. "They know about menswear," Gabino says. "They'll wear a \$10 T-shirt with a \$1,000 jacket. They mix high and low."

It's Gabino's job to select and unify these disparate brands. Gitman Bros. shirts, Filson bags and briefcases and workman-inspired clothing from Carhartt and Engineered Garments hang with luxury streetwear from Been Trill and County of Milan. There are clothing and footwear from Nike Sportswear that are retro in styling and technically advanced in fabrication and construction. And there are artisanal pieces from Comme des Garçons Homme Plus. It all works.

Born and raised in Winnipeg, Gabino was only a boy when he taught himself to sew and alter his clothes. He was breakdancing at eight, was a B-boy in high school and, restless and "curious about what else was out there," moved to Vancouver at 19. He made a place for himself as a dancer with Rascalz, the Juno Award-winning hip-hop group, and his love of fashion took root there as well.

A self-described big-picture thinker, Gabino loves the buying process, researching interesting brands that might "speak to our clientele, our ethos, our personality." He cares about quality and craftsmanship and, judging from his list of personal heroes, Rei Kawakubo, Michael Jordan and Muhammad Ali, admires persistence and people who aren't afraid to duke it out. "We're a generation maturing," he says. "Style-wise we're individuals. Our style comes from within." ■