

Eve Gravel: Femme Locale

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Montreal can feel like a world of infinite opportunity, especially when you're a small town girl from Chicoutimi, Québec. At age 18, fashion designer Eve Gravel knew that something bigger was waiting for her in the city. At age 22, she launched her first ready-to-wear line for women. Fast-forward to over a decade later, and Gravel has 28 collections to her name, a 2-year-old son and plans to expand her label's reach even further.

Gravel's Mile End studio feels like it's straight out of a Pinterest board. Natural light pours in from large windows with a view of Mont-Royal. "It's really beautiful when the sun sets behind the Church," says Gravel.

Cactuses are intermixed with racks of clothing from her latest collection: a playful pastiche of colourful prints, feminine cut outs and a dash of sporty stripes. Gravel is known for sourcing inspiration from street style and infusing her collections with a signature girly girl meets tomboy dichotomy.

"When I travel, I like to find a bench, grab a coffee and watch people go by. It's like a little fashion show," says Gravel. "I really like guys' style. Men are more limited than women in what they can wear, so they need to be more creative."

Today, Gravel is sporting a pair of boyfriend jeans and a watercolour printed shirt from spring/summer 2016, a fresh and flirty collection inspired by her favourite indulgence: ice-cream.

"Finding nice fabric that's different from other designers is never easy. Sometimes I design my own prints. Every season, with each collection, you always try to be more innovative and push your designs to a new level," she says.

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Walk into some of Canada's leading boutiques, and you're bound to spot one of Gravel's contemporary-casual creations. It's easy to see why musicians like Cœur de pirate, Norah Jones and Ariane Moffatt have worn her designs.

Gravel has worked in Montreal's Mile End area for 12 years and has her routine: coffee at Café Nève, a bagel at St-Viateur and sushi picnics in the park. When she gets the chance, she travels for inspiration. Having visited about 30 countries since she started globetrotting at age 16, she hopes to follow in the footsteps of her grandmother, who at age 76 has been to 100 countries and counting.

"It's hard to pick a favourite place but I really liked Asia. I went to Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia. The colours! You can take a picture of anything and it's pretty," says Gravel. "The way people live and work there is so different. I love to be in situations that destabilize you and force you to go with the flow."

Gravel's love of new challenges has pushed her to continually elevate her design aesthetic, while still remaining commercially friendly and wearable. Now selling across Canada and in over 20 boutiques throughout the United States, she's hoping to further expand south of the border while still manufacturing all of her clothing in Canada.

"We're trying to bring back Canadian manufacturing to Montreal. There aren't a lot of contractors anymore. The new generation wants to design but they don't necessarily want to sew," says Gravel. "Together, Montreal designers are trying to figure out our future and how we can continue to work here."

Her advice for new designers? Work hard and never take no for an answer.

"I wouldn't be where I am now if I wasn't determined to follow my path. It's funny because some of the people who said no to me 10 years ago want me now. That's a good feeling," she says. "When I moved to Montreal, I thought that it was so big, I could do anything. All the possibilities were here. I just had to find my voice."

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