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A BALANCE OF OPPOSITES

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Brooklyn-based label H Fredriksson's beginnings are a familiar, yet inspiring, story—one of great ideas, a cult following, and buyers who wanted more. With a pleasantly inventive panoply of distinctive silhouettes and striking fabrications, the self-taught designer's eponymous label has quickly climbed the indie fashion ranks since its fall 2003 launch. Neiman Marcus and Fred Segal are among the U.S. stockists for the progressive line. The fresh look that Swedish owner/designer Helena Fredriksson describes as "modern and organic with an emphasis on the natural female form and a balance of opposites" is the culmination of artistic and cultural influences.

Fredriksson studied photography, art history, sculpture and painting in Sweden, as well as painting and printmaking at the Art Students League of New York. Like many fashion fanatics turned designers, she admits that she became interested in clothing design at a young age. "I have been making clothes and experimenting with patterns and designs since I was a little girl," she recalls. "I used to collect vintage in my early teenage years; I would study them for patterns and construction and create new designs for myself from what I learned."

feature.



Since day one, photography has been one of the strongest influences in her work. "It's about capturing what I see and keeping the impressions so I can use them in my work. I always shoot a lot as a part of the process for finding the direction in each collection. I also work from my photos when creating the graphics for my fabric designs and other HF materials."

The empire doll dresses and a few tops from the fall 2007 collection are made from printed silk, reworked from a photograph that she took in the jungle in Puerto Rico. "In terms of actual silk-screens, there are only a few in this collection—the black yoke dress, as well as the T-shirt, has hand-silk-screened lace around the neckline. It's a vintage lace that I reworked; the original is a crocheted Swedish vintage piece from my lace collection."

"I always get a lot of ideas from film and art," she continues. "For fall '07, the colors and feel in Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* was very inspiring. Some of the artists that influence me are Gerhard Richter, Sophie Calle, Gustav Klimt, Francesca Woodman and Michael Borremans. I also saw an Art Deco furniture exhibit at Musée d'Orsay in Paris that inspired me a lot."

For the spring 2008 collection she has crafted two new printed silks, and in addition to the introduction of some fabulous new shapes she's also reinventing some H Fredriksson signature items. "The collection has a feel of nostalgia and a muted summer palette. Think of a bleached-out Polaroid photograph of a Swedish seaside in the 1970s," she offers.

Fredriksson has shown her collections on the runway a handful of times, including twice with GenArt. Her unique artistic spirit is conveyed throughout every show and includes film installations done in collaboration with Seth Kirby from English Kills, a close friend and a great filmmaker. Fredriksson's husband, Mike Skinner, "an amazing musician and producer," always does the music for the films and runway shows.

Helena Fredriksson seems to thrive on collaborations with other artists. "I do pieces for Ana Matronic from the Scissor Sisters, and I will do some pieces for KT Tunstall. I'm also working on costumes for a dance project with Swedish dancer Olof Persson and I did some pieces for Joy Dietrich's new film *Tie a Yellow Ribbon*. And I am going to Japan to talk about a possible collaboration in September that I'm very excited about."

Travel is, of course, one of her greatest inspirations. "I love the feeling of going someplace I've never been. The knowledge that I will come back with new thoughts and ideas from a different culture is probably the most inspiring part of life to me."

The ever-so-talented Swede says that as long as she's living in the States, she'll call Brooklyn home. But a return to her Swedish roots seems inevitable at some point, as she revels in her extended stays abroad. She reflects on the influential nature of her environs: "The change in Williamsburg has been enormous since I first moved here. It's very interesting to be a part of and it has inspired me a lot. The contrast and variety in the neighborhood is what I love the most and I bring that balance of opposites into my design."

For more info, visit www.hfredriksson.com.

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