

STANLEY CARROLL



## A quarter century of design

MARTA GOLD  
Journal Feature Writer  
EDMONTON

**In** his 25 years as a fashion designer, Stanley Carroll has lived and worked in Canada and Europe, opened stores in Edmonton and London, had up to 30 people on his payroll and now, works pretty much on his own.

What has remained constant through his years of travelling, designing and retailing is his signature clothing—simple, clean lines, interesting fabrics and a playfulness and intricacy that belies the minimalism of his designs.

His 25th anniversary in the business is as much a testament to his enduring fashion aesthetic as it is to his love of clothes.

"I've always tried to stay true to what I esthetically believe in," he explains from his sparsely clean, well-organized studio above a 99th Street grocery store. "I've always liked playing with volume, and there's always been some semblance of asymmetry.

And there's a certain sense of subtle wit—pieces that make you take a double take. At first glance, it looks normal and then you think, 'something is a little twisted here.'" he adds with his distinctive Dutch lilt.

"At the end of the day, what I think about is making clothes that are interesting to people."

Carroll was born in Holland and moved to his father's native Canada as a teenager, living first in Ontario and then in Yellowknife. He absorbed his mother's passion for clothes and, curious about how they were made, came to Edmonton to take the tailoring and dressmaking program at NAIT. Later, working at one of the second-hand stores so popular in the 1980s among vintage-clothing-seekers, he tossed a couple of shirts he had made himself onto the racks.

People liked them and encouraged him to put together his own line. He did, in 1983. Since then, he has opened and closed retail stores locally, moved back to Holland for a time and briefly to Belgium and opened a store in London. But he has always returned to his base in Edmonton, the place he calls his "second home."

"A lot of people have a love-hate relationship with Edmonton," he says. "It's very fashionable not to like it, but I think, deep down, there is something oddly strange and wonderful about this place. It's a lack of structure, a lack of rules, where you can really do whatever you want."

His business has expanded and scaled back again over the years. At its biggest in the early 1990s, it was a publicly traded company with a local head office, manufacturing facility and retail store in a shopping centre. But Carroll says the size of the enterprise meant he became more business manager than fashion designer, a role in which he did not feel comfortable.

**Now** he's virtually a one-man show, with a studio where he is the sole designer and draftsman. He even does some of the sewing himself, particularly when experimenting with new fabrics like the hand-woven hemp and organic cotton he's now trying. The rest of the sewing is done by contractors and home-sewers.

Left and above, spring/summer fashions by Stanley Carroll

Below, file photos of Carroll's designs from 1984 to '86

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— designer Stanley Carroll



Above, Stanley Carroll at his design table



Soon, he'll take the next step in growing his business by opening a retail store on Whyte Avenue in May. "It's like a musician—the difference between putting out a CD or playing a live gig. You get that instant feedback from the audience, good or bad."

While Carroll's signature look has remained over the years, influenced by early Japanese designers like Issey Miyake as well as edgy Europeans like Vivienne Westwood and Thierry Mugler, it has certainly evolved.

"I am learning to say more with less," he says. "When I first started off, the pieces were somewhat more gimmicky, somewhat more costume-y. Hopefully I've got better, by making pieces that are distinct and special but not to the point of extravagance, where they used to be."

Carroll's spring/summer collection for 2008 is being showcased tonight at Latitude 53 Gallery (tickets \$20, call 604-9247). His studio, at #201 8908 99th St., is open to the public most weekdays. His dresses start at about \$240 and pants start at about \$180. For more information, go to stanleycarroll.com.