

THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

RICHARDS

Words Amanda Lauren

Founded in 2012 by Sarah Leslie Richards, her eponymous line redefines the modern print. A born and bred New Yorker, Richards attended The Rhode Island School of Design. While in school, she took a class on digital printing, which sparked the idea for her avant-garde, yet traditionally-cut line for both men and women. All garments are designed by Richards herself and manufactured locally in Brooklyn. Prior to starting her own company, Richards worked for Peter Som, Diane Von Furstenberg, Opening Ceremony and Proenza Schouler. While contemporary print designers like Tory Burch, Diane Von Furstenberg and the godmother of them all, Lilly Pulitzer, have become household names, it's only a matter of time before Richards joins their league.

You work mostly with silk. Why this fabric in particular? Do you have any other fabrics you like working with or plan on expanding your collection to?

Silk is a fantastic fabric to print on. It takes dye beautifully and carries color brilliantly. The prismatic prints in my Fall/Winter 2014 collection, for example, were best translated on silk. In addition to having vibrant color, silk is a lovely fabric to wear and touch. I also work with cotton and I am very fond of denim. For Spring 15 I am developing some crepe and tech fabrics in other fibers, which I am excited to incorporate into the line. I am always looking for new fabrics to use, which can add levels of texture to the collection.

Bold, graphic prints are currently the signature of your line, do you plan to continue in this direction?

I can't help but design in a bold fashion. Although I try to stay away from heavy or overly busy prints, which can plague digitally-printed clothes, my designs often make a very pronounced visual statement. I am very attracted to strong symbols and colors, and I like to present these things in a very obvious fashion. I am also very attracted to un-muddled, almost primary shades, which do not come across as especially subtle.

How does being born and raised in Manhattan influence you artistically?

For one thing, it has shown me that there is no limit to personal style. No matter what you design, there is someone out there who will wear it! New York City is such a huge part of my DNA that it's hard to imagine creating my work anywhere else. In a way, my design process is to let in every appealing idea, give it time to stew together, and then filter out the result. The bombardment of culture and stimulation in the city feel very comforting to me, and I think it has fostered the way I gather inspiration without judging the source.

What's the biggest risk you've taken?

After my thesis and first collection, which were entirely composed of green hues, it seemed a great risk to divert from that verdant path. However, in hindsight it was an absolutely necessary evolution. I create all my prints on my own and often go to sample production without showing my designs to another soul. Coming from an academic background where work is shared continuously with peers, it can often feel like a great risk to work in this way. I always wonder if people will love it or hate it! But I also really appreciate the opportunity it gives me to express my idea without the sense that I have watered down or altered my vision due to insecurity. I know that I may not be able to work in this way forever, so for now I try to never second-guess my gut instincts and really put my unfiltered ideas out there.

What do you wish you could change about woman's fashion today?

I think the greatest change could be a shift back to local manufacturing on a large scale. Generally reducing the reliance on overseas production and focusing more on modernizing the textiles and apparel industries that are struggling, especially here in NYC, would be a great step forward. Although Europe and Asia will always remain invaluable resources for innovative technology, a designer should be able to produce their product in the US without burdening the customer with a high price tag.



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