

FASHION TO KNOW

MARC PHILIPPE COUDEYRE

Written by LYNN FURGE Photography by ZEB DAEMEN

A gentleman knows how to dress a lady, and only a man surrounded by sisters as he traveled the world can put the passion into practice with the ease of a stroll in the park. That is precisely what Marc Philippe Coudeyre gives his client, a garment that embodies the energy of the city while draping perfectly like an arm around a dear friend.

His woman is an active woman, no wallflower; social, but not demanding or “showy”. He really wants her to live in his pieces, enjoy them, experience life in them. There is a subtle youthfulness to his designs. The collections tell stories of the girl he was inspired by at the time.

Just because there is a vibrant attitude doesn't mean that his craftsmanship is amateur or slight—quite the opposite. Educated at the Royal Academy in Antwerp for his masters, he immediately started working for Belgian couture house Natan after graduation. He was rapidly given control of their first ready-to-wear collection, which received rave reviews. After four seasons he decided to start his own collection, while still working on Natan. Juggling both hasn't even caused him to break a sweat, because he was born to be a designer.

“I like to evolve and re-invent myself every season. I have a very personal approach to fashion. I like to give my collections titles and have a little story behind each one. This is something for sure I will continue doing. For me fashion is a way of expressing myself. I grew up in Abu Dhabi, Bogota, and Jakarta. I have had all of these cultures walking around me in different garments. I grew up being a foreigner with a reminder that “you are different to all of these people” so I have a general interest in clothes. I can feel it coming out of me when I design. When you have your personal memories coming out of your design process you want to express it and you want to pin-point it,” explains Coudeyre.

His previous education was in architecture, seven years in Germany to be exact. His parents weren't pleased when they found out he was switching his career path to fashion, and he was older than his other classmates when he got to Antwerp, but life experience led the way.

“The most important thing I learned from architecture is BE IT. You have to look at each

project 100% on the human level. If the scale is 1-100 or 1-200 it is not so much the scale but the context of that building. Where are you going to build? Do you have a river in front of you? In fashion we create a little atmosphere for you. There is context the patterns, the colors, the design, the functional utility.”

Along with that practical, schooled approach to his work there is a lightness, a humorous approach to the clothing with his themes and stories. Last season's collection, Avalon, treated the viewer to perforated scaled gold gilded leather and metallic sheath dresses, an homage to both the King Arthur legend as well as the song by Roxy Music. For Spring 2011 the collection is called Koi. There is a print directly referencing fish and scales, then a moiré, through which the grain of the fabric shows the aquatic influence, as well as washed linen, which also cites the fluid inspiration. He often mixes draped pieces with garments that are seen in casual wear so the viewer gets a surprise in contrast, blurring the soft with hard.

“Jean Nouvel built the big Torre Agbar building in Barcelona and he said ‘the definition of something new is actually taking the things that already exist but mixing them together in a different way.’ That for me is how I try to create my own designs,” Coudeyre says. “Koi has kimono shapes and geisha with cocktail pieces. I put the very chic elegant cocktail atmosphere from Europe with geisha drapings and kimono jackets. They don't match together necessarily, but with the colors and fabrics, the whole silhouette, it looks perfect. I feel they create a duality.”

Of all the Orientalism seen this season, Marc Philippe's is one that has a timeless quality. Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana agreed, selecting the designer as one of an elite 21 to sell pieces alongside Dolce & Gabbana's own in their Milan concept store Spiga 2, which opened in September.

Marc Philippe grew up with three sisters in a very feminine environment. He was always asked his opinion about their style and wardrobe. His fashion acumen became a sort of sixth sense. These very strong childhood memories—and observation of different cultures, analyzing and being intrigued by the way people around him were dressed—have resulted in a very saleable line. He thinks about the client every step of the way: what they would wear, how they would exist in these clothes. His collections are both modest and interesting, just like the man himself; soft-spoken, generous with his ideas and his words, in full appreciation of his place within the industry. “My working experience has shown me that you have to be very careful when you design, because at the end of the day you have to sell it. I am very sensitive about what to design but I realize I have to be careful to keep my creativity as personal as possible and not surrender to all of the commercial demands. The academy has a very hard, strict regime. We started with 70 students and ended up 4 years later with 14 graduates. It becomes a development of your entire personality. You come out of that and suddenly you are responsible for your first collection where you are to dress women 40-60 with an average size of 42. No longer are we allowed to do pleats on shoulders or breasts, or pockets. Any pieces that are too complicated and wouldn't flatter an ‘everywoman’ type of silhouette. Consumers want different, but buyers want what will sell, so coming from such a creative atmosphere where we were pushed every day to be unique, has to be balanced with the reality of the business. Are you doing this to sell or are you doing this to be in *Dazed and Confused*? That is the question I ask myself as a business person.”

No matter what type of education is available, one can't train instinct, and while school can prepare someone for the technical skills to facilitate their job, the passion has to be innate. Standing next to Marc Philippe while he pulls garment after garment from his hanging rack, you know that each seam means something to him. “I realized I couldn't express myself enough through architecture. I was missing something with the colors. In fashion there is this wonderful part where you look at the fabrics together and it really creates a new being. Today I am much more fulfilled. Fashion is one of the most complete jobs you can have. You have to be interested in more things than any other job. You need to be anthropological, sensitive to film, music, art, theatre, you have to be complete. You have so many more possibilities.”



Model: AMÉLIE LENS at Dominique Models.