

THE ANALYST

WEST COAST COOL AND SCANDINAVIAN SMARTS ARE STITCHED INTO EACH PIECE OF PATRIK ERVELL'S LINE, BRINGING THE MENSWEAR CATEGORY INTO THE FUTURE ONE SCULPTURAL WINDBREAKER AT A TIME

WRITER: JOHANNA LENANDER
PORTRAIT: MICHAEL EDWARDS

Studying political science and art history at Berkeley may seem an unorthodox preparation for a fashion career, but in the case of rising menswear designer Patrik Ervell, an academic background makes sense. His modern, meticulously crafted sportswear is clearly conceived

EAST MEETS WEST: At center, the Sweden-born, California-educated designer at his Manhattan atelier along with models donning looks from Ervell's spring 2009 line





STEADY AS HE GOES:

Expanded methodically from a smattering of shirts and trousers, Ervell's collection is now complete, just three years later: suittings, sportswear, even ruffled tuxedo shirts



“It’s modernism, but it isn’t cold. It has feeling.”

by an analytical mind with no tolerance for the trite or trend-driven. While other fledgling talents may launch their own lines because they can’t find the perfect T-shirt or because they dream of dressing ingénues, Ervell’s sartorial calling was prompted by an exasperation with industry clichés.

Upon graduating, he landed a job as an editor for *V* magazine, where working on fashion shoots quickly taught him what he did and didn’t like about the business. “I would listen to references to the same celebrities, subcultures and fashion periods over and over...It seemed so culturally dead,” he says. So after three years on staff, he left the magazine, took some classes at Parsons and started to construct his own clothes in late 2004. “Approaching design from an editorial background does lead you to think more about the context of the clothes and their meaning, as opposed to just the merchandising of a collection or developing a product,” he says of the shift from styling to designing. “It’s such a rare, hands-on experience to be able to actually make something and then sell it to a store.”

His debut was deliberately low-key, as Ervell wanted to

find his feet as a designer before launching a full-fledged line. In early 2005, he placed just a couple of shirts and trousers at the lower Manhattan boutique Opening Ceremony – an easy enough feat since the acclaimed store is located on the first floor of his apartment building and owned by friends Humberto Leon and Carol Kim. It was the kind of break every budding haberdasher needs, and the garments were well received, urging Ervell to build the line in increments each season. “It all happened organically,” he says. “It’s been a very gradual process.”

Despite his careful pacing, just two years later, Ervell won the prestigious Ecco Domani award, a stipend that funds runway presentations for the emergent. The slow-and-steady designer was then obligated to produce a formal show. “Once you start doing shows, you can’t stop,” he admits. This media initiation then drew more rave reviews, attracting a following of art patrons and rock stars.

So why has a designer who strives to keep a low

profile made such a splash? Probably because he has pulled off something very tricky: reviving American sportswear. Ervell’s looks are effortless without being simple, structured without being stiff and innovative without losing their inherent masculinity. There’s also a dedication to meticulous hand-finishing – including a metal stud-covered cardigan in the fall collection that took three months to make – and a sense of newness in his choice of high-tech fabrics, such as laminated polyurethane mixed with wool. “It’s modernism, but it isn’t cold,” he says, “It has feeling.”

His aversion to cultural references is coupled with a disdain for disposable fads. “My collection is about continuous development, not massive seasonal shifts,” he says. This means that rather than completely changing his message each season, Ervell sticks to signature looks including his soft, lining-less suittings and his “air jacket,” a sculptural but still wear-with-everything windbreaker. “I have silhouettes that are my silhouettes. I believe in them, and I’m going to keep making them,” he promises.

Ervell credits this commitment to technique and nuance to his Scandinavian roots. He was born in Sweden and lived on a small island outside Gothenburg before moving to California when he was five. His West Coast upbringing shines through in the casual-luxe of the pieces, but, he attests, “The emphasis is on quality, not a display of status or a statement of wealth. That’s my Swedish side.” Apparently, it takes an outsider’s perspective to make American menswear interesting again. ▀