

CITY

THE DESTINATION FOR STYLE

INTERVIEW: DESIGNER

Yeohlee Q&A

Yeohlee Teng, the Malaysian designer and Parsons graduate, has always had architecture in her heart. Teng was awarded the National Design Award in 2004 by the Cooper-Hewitt Museum for fashion designer of the year, and her clothes have appeared in several recent international exhibits documenting architecture's influence on fashion design. Her clothes will be part of the upcoming "Skin and Bones" exhibit this September at The Museum of Contemporary Art in LA. CITY's Trang Chuong spoke with Teng about design, architecture, and her catchphrase, "urban nomad."

CITY: What does "Urban Nomad" refer to?

YT: Urban nomad was a term I coined while developing the Fall 97 collection, which was based on my experience traveling through the Kansai International Airport in Japan and watching all the different people go by lugging their bags, heading from one destination to the next. The term defines a lifestyle of constant mobility that requires clothing that works on a variety of practical and psychological levels. My clothes address efficiency for we are all urban nomads. Comfort doesn't undermine aesthetic so comfortable clothes can look differently.

CITY: What type of fabrics do you like to work with?

YT: Textile selection is critical to the feel of the collection. Spring 2006 runs the gamut from white featherweight smocked cotton to black double face wool, accompanied by hints of grass green silk and textured "barked" silk tussah in a tan mélange.

CITY: Is there a running theme in your current collection?

YT: Spring 2006 was inspired by the linear construction of the Modern French architect Robert Mallet-Stevens and the dynamic sweep of suspension bridges.

CITY: What is the significance of suspension bridges—in his work and yours?

YT: Suspension bridges are awe-inspiring engineering feats. They are beautiful gravity-defying structures that influenced the construction of my collection—from the necklines to the hemlines. I looked at the construction of the cabling system and interpreted how to use it to hold up the clothes rather than having them fall on the shoulders.

CITY: Your clothes have been described as "intimate architecture." What does this refer to?

YT: "Intimate architecture" refers to the relationship between clothing and the body, and between the individual and the environment.

CITY: Why is the neckline so important to you?

YT: The neckline frames the face. There's comfort and warmth; it keeps you insulated. People see the neck, face, and upper body first. Necklines are part of negative space. If you take a look, crewnecks are the items that are sold the most. I guess I have a fascination with the act of concealing and revealing; I'm intrigued by the mystery and the allure of it all.

CITY: How does architectural design inspire and influence your design ethos?

YT: I'm inspired by all things visual from movies, videos, video games, and graphics, to what's being shown around me: exhibitions, things around me, people on the street, as well as architectural design. My seasonal collections are affected by



the narrative, options, inspirations and people's needs at the time. There is no one formula that goes into designing my collections; each season we work differently. My quest is to do things that are fresh to the eye—to set a standard on how one views things. The axis for my upcoming Spring 07 line is very L.A.-influenced since I'm going to be a part of the "Skin and Bones" exhibit this fall at the Museum of Contemporary Art, which will be shown in the 25,000-square-foot Geffen Contemporary space. It's a very international cast of designers and architects from around the world including Viktor + Rolf, Hussein Chalayan, and others. It will be very interesting as it will show many individualistic points of view. I strive for simplicity; balance and proportions entrance me. When something has universal appeal and it works in a multitude of people, that is very appealing to me ... even magical.

CITY: How have Mallet-Stevens' designs affected your current collection?

YT: I admired his work for years without ever consciously attributing the source. In fact, I used an image of his post office for a Fall 1995 show invitation. Mallet-Stevens' disciplined use of linearity, geometry, black and white, and weight and lightness attract me to his work. I tried to strike the same balance in this collection, which could be illustrated by the white pebbled cotton separated by striped "windows" of translucent black "barked" cotton.

CITY: Which architects have inspired your collections?

YT: [Many] architects and/or buildings have influenced my work, consciously and subconsciously, including Louis Sullivan, Louis Kahn, Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishiwaza of SANAA (the designers of the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York) and the Guggenheim. Giuseppe Terragni has a big influence on my Fall 2006 collection...