



« HARRICANA BY MARIOUCHE »
**RESPONSIBLY REINVENTING
THE FASHION HIGH STREET**
BY CAROLYNE KAUSER-ABBOTT

Far from being a fashion expert, somehow I found myself drawn to the story of a Canadian, luxury fur-design house. Inspired by historical traditions native to Canada and named after a long Quebec river, Montreal-based Harricana was formed almost 20 years ago.

Harricana by Mariouche is focused on eco-luxe design, by developing luxurious, contemporary fashion collections and accessories from recycled fur, silks and other high-quality fabrics. As the company enters its third decade, garment sales now extend to 18 countries around the globe. With a spotlight on the environment and responsible manufacturing, it is only fitting that the headquarters for Harricana is

in a repurposed building that once housed a bank.

I reached the company's Founder, President and Head Designer Mariouche Gagné in her Montreal office on a Friday afternoon. Despite the fact that her Executive Assistant was away sick, and her General Manager was on maternity leave she took plenty of time to talk to me about her company and her passion for Harricana. The basis of her philosophy is that she does not design as a passing trend.

Like a honeybee moving between flowers, Mariouche at 16-years old had a fleeting interest in many scholastic subjects, including journalism, fine arts, architecture and fashion. As she strained to choose a career path, Mariouche narrowed her alternatives slightly when she determined that architecture required too much time in school, and it might curb her extracurricular activities and sporting interests. Always drawn to fashion but not terribly enamored with school, Mariouche describes herself as an outdoors girl.

While attending the fashion design program at LaSalle College, in Montreal, she entered a competition for young designers; her inspiration for a striking white coat was the Canadian polar bear. Mariouche's submission in the competition secured



IMAGES COURTESY OF HARRICANA BY MARIOUCHE

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her top prize: an internship at Printemps Haussmann in Paris. Her stretch in Paris was instrumental – a launching pad for continued overseas study and a self-confirmation that she was destined to be zippered closely to the fashion world.

At barely 21-years old, Mariouche was accepted into the Domus Academy in Milan, Italy, to complete her master's degree. The course alone was \$25,000 – before living expenses and food – and she had only \$10,000 to her name. Mariouche asked her mother to sell everything, including her most cherished possessions: her snowboard and her sewing machine. Her pragmatic mother, understanding that those sales would not net enough of a return, suggested her daughter participate in the Fur Council of Canada's 'Fur Design Student Contest'. With no alternative, Mariouche entered the competition; her entry, which won second prize, was a ski/snowboard coat trimmed with pieces from her mother's old fur coat. Little did Mariouche know at the time that this would become the foundation block for her future business pursuits.

Although she studied in Italy, Japan and Denmark, Mariouche is clear that her home is in Montreal, her roots in Quebec, and her vision is for Canada to make an imprint on the global fashion world. Influenced by her international studies, Mariouche feels strongly that fashion should not be intended to be disposable, and buyers should not be obsessed with seasonal trends. Lasting wardrobe pieces are born from high-quality materials and thoughtful, classic design adorned with playful contemporary elements. It is these garments that become family heirlooms.

Harricana estimates that they have recycled well over 80,000 coats, which translates into hundreds of tons of refurbished fur, thus saving countless animals' lives. What Mariouche and her team have captured at Harricana is that sentimental attachment to a fur coat runs deep even when style and fit are outdated. Harricana has roughly 500 designs for coats and hats, not including their purely custom work. The Harricana store in Montreal is designated an EcoMusée where visitors can take a 45-minute tour to comprehend the fur recycling and coat transformation process.

Currently, most of the used fur coats come from Quebec or nearby, but Mariouche's vision is to grow her business to a more global offering aided by the Internet and strategic investment. With the new world order of

food-trucks and pop-up stores, Harricana may just surprise and wow customers in the future with a nomadic, traveling shop. Still in the dream stage, this mobile retail outlet could be destined for exclusive winter locations such as Park City, Utah during Sundance or the streets of Chamonix, France.

According to Mariouche, the Canadian fashion industry needs to re-grow its roots. At one time a country where artisans created high-quality textiles and boots with leathers and furs, it is now a disjointed trade with no clear succession plan. Where countries like Italy have a deep, traditional respect for those who work in the fashion industry – from designers to seamstresses, Canada has relied too heavily on foreign production. The lack of young talent is a genuine future threat.

Mariouche describes herself as passionate, stubborn and a nature lover. Her dream job had been to work at Patagonia under the direction of Yvon Chouinard, re-fashioning outdoor clothing to better suit women. She may have exceeded her dream. She is currently teamed up with Rossignol of Val d'Isère, France, on an eco-collaboration of functional-skiwear-meets-high-fashion. The first 15-piece collection includes shapely jackets trimmed with Harricana's fur accents. The 2013/14 winter-fashion compilation is a testament to the core of two companies, Rossignol and Harricana, both tethered to high-quality standards. Each outfit is created when the detailed piecework from Italy and Montreal comes together.

It is not too much of a stretch to think that Mariouche's school project has now brought her full circle as she prepares to take her company to new fashion heights. ■

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Caribou Sweater - Coyote
Made from Ecoluxe® Materials:
Recycled coyote coat
\$550.00



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