

VERSO

Summer 2016 | Issue 01



A MAGAZINE FOR INDIVIDUALS

STAY SHADY



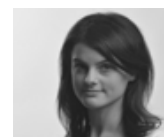
Anti-glare
SINCE 1945

CONTRIBUTORS

Jesse Laufer is *VERSO's* editor, charged with overseeing magazine development. As an out of work bartender from the West Coast, he's inspired by the East Coast vibe and its energetic maritime history merged with a classy, laid-back culture that defies stereotypes.



Brandon Young is a recent journalism graduate from the University of King's College. Hailing from Halifax, he's been fortunate to have been exposed to differing lifestyles in his hometown. As art director, he's thrilled to have been instrumental in creating the look and feel of the magazine. Brandon believes that personality shines through effortlessly—keep it simple and be real.



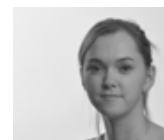
◀ **Jillian Morgan** is the managing editor at *VERSO*. She oversees scheduling, ensures material meets deadlines and provides content-flow assistance to the editor. Her roots are in St. John's, Newfoundland, but she is currently calling Halifax her home. Her connection to both East Coast cities and her love for the laid-back lifestyle motivated her to be a part of *VERSO*.



Shelby Banks is the photography editor for *VERSO*. She oversees and edits all photo content in the magazine. Banks moved to Halifax from Toronto in 2012 and, with almost eight years of photography experience, Banks is creative in how she captures style for readers, allowing them to experience its uniqueness like it is their own.



◀ **Shelby Bona** is the copy editor for *VERSO*. She ensures content is accurate and factual and that there are no distracting typos. With an eye for sub-cultural fashion, Shelby got involved with *VERSO* to explore her passion for how Atlantic Canadians take the biggest trend of the moment and make it their own.



Introducing **VERSO**

A MAGAZINE FOR INDIVIDUALS

VERSO means 'the reverse of something: The other side of what we see. *VERSO* magazine is the reverse of typical fashion and lifestyle magazines that introduce trends to their readers. At *VERSO*, we tell Atlantic Canadians about the trendsetters and innovators where they live. *VERSO* magazine captures what it means to be young in Atlantic Canada. With a clean, gender-neutral approach, *VERSO* is dedicated to curating lifestyles that appeal to those who are seeking to bridge the gap between professionalism and individuality. Fresh, minimalist photography and a voice that is distinctly East Coast, *VERSO* captures the attitude of Atlantic Canadian style which isn't dependent on money or brands, but is focused on acquiring style with ease. *VERSO* highlights the urban and laid-back vibe of East Coast Canada through the lens of local designers, retailers and influencers. Our magazine expresses the unique identity Atlantic Canadians have created in our corner of the world.

You create the brand for this magazine—make it your own.

[Subscribe today @ versomag.ca/subscribe]

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NOTED

Welcome to *VERSO*, the only magazine that explores the lifestyle inspiration defining our generation.

VERSO curates a regional vibe. We're motivated by the people around us—energized, professional, creative, and artistic. This magazine is about you because you inspire us. We want to tell stories of the icons and ideas that are unknown about this part of Canada.

Behind *VERSO* is versatility. Life in our corner of the country is about making a big impact with what we have. This region is a blend of cutting edge, old school and up-and-comers. Like you, *VERSO* wants to be adaptive and creative.

At the heart of this magazine are these questions: What intrigues us? What motivates us? What gives us our edge? What sets us apart?

This issue, it's Toban Ralston. As Brandon Young writes in our cover story, "There couldn't be a more

opportune moment for a designer like Ralston to come along." Based in Halifax, this unisex designer is pushing the limits of how fashion transforms us.

VERSO is a seasonal-based style magazine, but we only publish three times a year. The fleeting Atlantic Canadian Spring doesn't give readers enough time to enjoy our magazine. We blend Spring styles into longer Summer issues instead.

Our first issue covers the stories and people we see trending in Halifax this summer. With this special edition, we show you a sampling of style stories we're digging up—be they fashion, body, or life. In the Fall issue we'll visit Moncton. Then we'll cross the Northumberland Strait to take in Winter, island-style. We look forward to the journey ahead.

Sincerely,

Jesse Laufer, *VERSO* Magazine.

IN THE NUDE



Stay au naturale with our new **In the Nude** palette

FROM THE GRAM

Unfortunately, not all of our great photos make it to print, but they do make it to Instagram. Follow us @versomag



SUMMER SKIN CARE

WORDS BY SHELBY BONA
PHOTOS BY SHELBY BANKS

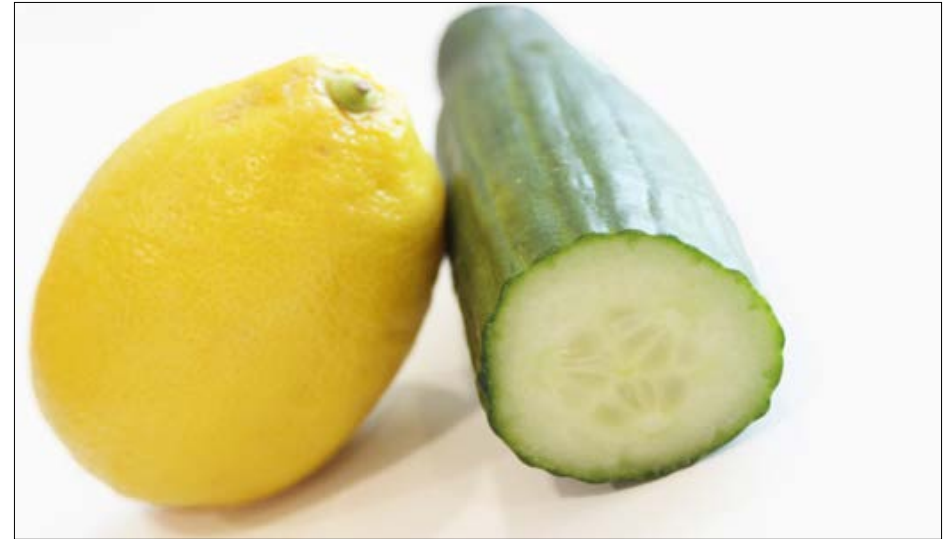
Nothing ruins a day at the beach or a stroll on the waterfront faster than a skin emergency. For those days when sunscreen has failed you—or when you accidentally forgot to put it on—here are a few homemade skin care recipes for serious summer damage control



OIL ABSORBING FACE MASK

Sunscreen can lead to unpleasant—but unavoidable—break-outs if you have acne-prone, oily skin. Thankfully, a soothing oatmeal and egg-white mask can help dry out blemishes and absorb excess oil.

1. Mix 5 Tbsp plain, non-instant oatmeal with 10 Tbsp water in a microwave-safe container. Cook until oatmeal is soft and let it stand for 3 minutes to cool
2. Add 1 Tbsp of honey and one egg white and mix well
3. Apply to clean, dry skin and let sit for 15 minutes before rinsing with warm water and moisturizing



SKIN BRIGHTENING SCRUB

This scrub will help moisturize and refresh dry, dehydrated skin after hours spent in the sun. It's best used twice a week, and doubles as a body scrub.

1. Pour ¼ cup of granulated sugar into an air-tight container
2. Add 1 tsp each of honey and extra virgin olive oil
3. Add ½ tsp of lemon juice
4. Mix ingredients to make the scrub
5. Dampen face with warm water and gently apply scrub in circular motion over skin (avoid eye area)
6. Leftover scrub can be stored in fridge for up to one week

(Note: if you want to brighten and hydrate your skin but aren't a fan of scrubs, just leave out the sugar and use only the lemon, honey and olive oil mixture as a mask. Apply it to clean, dry skin and let it sit for 10-15 minutes. Then rinse with warm water and moisturize.)

ULTRA

WORDS BY JESSE LAUFER
PHOTO BY BRANDON YOUNG

Summer and sunglasses: it's almost as good a combination as hot days and margaritas. But choosing sunglasses can be daunting—a pair of sunglasses can go from a few bucks to hundreds of dollars. Justifying a heftier price tag means expecting more bang for your buck.

There are three main types of sunglasses: cosmetic, general purpose and special purpose, says Health Canada. Cosmetic sunglasses tend to be found at the gas station on the way to the lake. Cheap glasses aren't recommended for driving because they simply make everything darker while not always blocking out UV rays.

According to Health Canada, it's important to protect your eyes from all light—not just sunlight. Damage can come from UV rays, bright light and blue light.

General purpose glasses can also be found on the cheap. Even the least expensive designer sunglasses are a sure bet to meet eye-care criteria. They block UVA and UVB light without simply tricking your eyes with darker lenses.

Special purpose glasses are good for prolonged exposure to light. Think an arctic researcher. These sunglasses are dark and safe, but not recommended for driving.

Regardless of which pair you choose, you're sure to turn heads this Summer. ■

VITAL



Sunglasses need to be stylish, but they also have to protect your eyes.



PER DIEM

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JILLIAN MORGAN

Indulge yourself in Halifax this summer with the light fare, style and pampering you crave on every corner. Follow our tips for a day tour that covers morning coffee to evening cocktails

EAT

Live like a Parisian with **Le French Fix Pâtisserie**, located at 5233 Prince St. and enjoy an orange blossom macaron or a warm croissant.

Need a mid-day pick-me-up? Try an Iced Mocha or Iced Chai Latte from **The Wired Monk Coffee Bistro**, located at 5147 Morris St. If you prefer tea, **World Tea House** at 1592 Argyle St. has you covered with a large selection of loose-leaf teas, hand-selected and imported from around the world.

The Juice Press at 1475 Lower Water St. serves healthy, raw-pressed juices. Skinny-Green gives you all the energy you need for the day with a healthy dose of cucumber, kale, spinach, green apple, celery, lemon and ginger. Beet Down—spiked with plenty of carrots—helps repair skin damage caused by those harmful UV rays. The Juice Press, serves hangover cures, skin fixes and more in a tasty juice blend.

But if you're not quite ready to give up on indulging, visit **Scanway Catering and Pastry**, at 1567 Grafton St. for specialty doughnuts and pastries. Local favourites include Maple Bacon, S'more, Coconut and Dough'ssants. If doughnuts don't satisfy your sweet tooth, try a featured cupcake at **Layers Wedding Cakes and Cupcakes** at 1276 Barrington St.

If you're in the North End, stop by **Julien's Patisserie, Bakery and Cafe** at 5517 Young St. located in the historic and trendy **Hydrostone Market**. Then stop by **Liquid Gold Tasting Bar & All Things Olive** at 5525 Young St. to taste-test their flavour-infused olive oils and balsamic vinegars.



SHOP

For the perfect blowout, visit **Alicia Melanson Salon and Blowdry Bar** at 1727 Barrington St. For an edgier look, **One Block Barbershop** at 2010 Gottingen St. offers you endless cuts and styles to update your look.

If the summer sun hasn't given your skin enough of a healthy glow, stop by **OrganicTan** at 2594 Agricola St. and add a sun-kissed boost to your look.

Local boutiques offer unique pieces to add to your collection. **Brilliant Clothing Boutique** at 1539 Birmingham St. offers a large selection of high-quality items not available at malls or other retail outlets.

Elsie's Used Clothing at 1530 Queen St. and **Put Me On! Consignment** at 1526 Queen St. carry one of a kind items for any occasion. If you're looking for something more eccentric, try **The Black Market Boutique** at 1545 Grafton St.

Other local favourites include: **Sweet Pea Boutique** at 1542 Queen St. **Duggers Menswear** located at 5476 Spring Garden Rd. and **Biscuit General Store** at 1661 Argyle St.

DRINK

To finish off your evening, stop by **Bishop's Cellar** at 1477 Lower Water St. or **Garrison Brewing Company** at 1149 Marginal Rd. for beer, wine and shopping.

For a casual atmosphere and great selection of wine and beer (and let us not forget, some fantastic jazz music), try **Obladee Wine Bar** at 1600 Barrington St. or **Stillwell** at 1672 Barrington St.

The Middle Spoon Desserterie & Bar, which can be found at 1563 Barrington St. serves a wide selection of cocktails to satisfy every craving. Enjoy a manhattan or a martini with a delectable dessert. ■



GAUGING THE LIMITS

A form of body art that is thousands of years old, the recent explosion in ear-stretching among North American university students makes it a fresh and vibrant fashion trend for millennials

Once a sub-cultural staple for a small fraction of youth, ear stretching has been experiencing a surge in popularity in recent years. However, unlike most fashion trends that can be adopted and discarded with minimal evidence, the modification can be permanent if you're not careful. What makes you appear unique or interesting in your youth could cost you an excellent job opportunity or a promotion in the future.

BEFORE YOU STRETCH

Stretching jewelry is measured in gauges up to 00-gauge, then it's measured in millimetres. A standard ear piercing is 16-gauge and gauges decrease in number by twos as they increase in size. Florida-based online jewelry store, So Scene's ear stretching guide recommends placing lubricant on the ear lobe before stretching. They say you can use all-natural jojoba oil or vitamin E oil. You can also use actual lubricants, though it's best to use an unscented, water-based one. Additionally, you can put a small amount of antibacterial ointment on the jewelry; this will act as both a lubricant and preventative care if the fistula (the healed piercing) accidentally tears while stretching.

When starting the stretching process, it is best to use a type of jewelry called a taper. A taper is large and blunt on one end and slowly decreases in size to a finer point at the other. Stretching shouldn't hurt. If it does, that means the piercing isn't ready to be stretched so don't force it. Push the taper in until you meet resistance. Once inserted, the jewelry is held in place with tiny silicone rings called o-rings.

Don't get carried away. Going from a 16 gauge to the next size up can cause ripping of the fistula if you aren't careful. According to So Scene, you shouldn't skip gauge sizes, but increase one increment at a time. Doing so will help to prevent injury.

THE BASICS

Many websites offer brief tutorials on how to get started, but some don't mention how often you can stretch safely, not to mention that body modification is permanent. Body modification is not always well received in professional environments. So perhaps you can compromise. When choosing jewelry to wear at the office, keep it to simple colours. Avoid particularly

ornate jewelry, especially with larger gauges to make the mod subtler. Plugs are a better choice than tunnels or tapers because they don't draw as much attention.

Tunnels have a hole through the centre of the jewelry and are the most noticeable because they accentuate the size of the hole in your ear lobe. Plugs are a solid piece of material. Both ends of these jewelry styles are blunt, making them more comfortable to wear, especially when sleeping.

When your ears are stretched, go lighter with other accessories and let your gauges be your statement piece. You can always bust out the super fun jewelry when you're heading downtown after hours. A growing number of independent retailers carry the tapers, plugs and tunnels that are used to achieve and maintain stretched lobes. Nationwide stores, such as Ardene—a haven for tween girls—are even carrying a small selection of stretching jewelry as well.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Forcing the stretch can lead to tears, scar tissue (which will make future stretching even more difficult) and blowouts. A blowout, according to Shameless Body Jewels' blog, a local piercing studio in Halifax, occurs when force is used to insert larger jewelry. Tissue from the interior of the piercing gets forced out the back and you are left with a bubble of flesh. It hurts and it doesn't look very good.

If ignored, a blowout has to be repaired by surgically cutting away the offending tissue. But Shameless Body Jewels says it is possible to fix them if you move fast. They say to grab some extra virgin olive oil and some gauging jewelry that is two gauges smaller than your current size. Massage the oil into the ear lobe for five minutes, then insert the smaller jewelry from the back of the ear, not the front. This pushes the tissue back into the ear. Massage the oil into the ear two times a day until it heals. Though not guaranteed, this method could save you from the scalpel. But it's better to take your time when stretching to avoid this entirely.

Once you get the taper in all the way, you can switch to maintenance jewelry such as tunnels or plugs. So Scene doesn't suggest stretching more than once a month to avoid injury. ■

BREATHING DEEPLY

*Easing into the zen life with
Halifax's only yoga lifestyle boutique*

If you aren't careful, you might walk right past Bhavana Yoga Boutique. Nestled above a popular vegetarian restaurant on Halifax's busy Quinpool Road, Bhavana is one of the city's well-kept secrets—a little gem in a sea of yoga studios and athletic stores that have launched in the last decade.

Giants such as Lululemon and Lolë dominate the market in yoga clothing and accessories, yet Bhavana has been thriving since 2008. It is the only locally-owned yoga lifestyle store in town, supplying yogis with more than just bolsters and clothes; it offers the tools to support and expand your yoga practice beyond the mat.

Owner Krista Watters emerges from the consultation area of Bhavana. She is a certified yoga instructor with a background in horticulture. Originally from the East Coast, Watters left a less-than-satisfying secretarial career and travelled to Vancouver. It was there that she began her journey with yoga.

Bhavana is Sanskrit—an ancient language of India—and means “to cultivate”. Watters has chosen to cultivate an enterprise that is stocked with 100 per cent Canadian clothing brands.

She says that while living on the West Coast, she was exposed to many labels that she has since introduced to Halifax. Watters says yogis become more mindful of what brands they choose to support as they delve deeper into their yogic lifestyle. “You start to practice yoga and then your consciousness about yourself starts to open up, so then you're like, ‘Why am I sweating in something that was made in a sweatshop?’” she says, sipping on a tea. That's why she chooses to stock Bhavana with products and brands that are both ethically and ecologically conscious.

**WORDS BY SHELBY BONA
PHOTOS BY JILLIAN MORGAN**

Body



Bhavana is peaceful, with light-toned, natural wooden floors and rich but muted green-toned walls. The scents of mingling essential oils, courtesy of a large display by the cash register, reach your nostrils as you climb the stairs and soft, new-age music plays soothingly in the background. The shop, at first glance, looks like a clothing boutique, but then you spot the large array of books on the history and practice of yoga in a massive bookcase against the far right corner. A sage smudge sticks display is immediately to your left.

Beyond the counter is the consultation space. Bhavana offers one-on-one yoga instruction, as well as certified osteopathy and massage therapy treatments. Watters is also an Ayurvedic wellness consultant: a natural healing practice that aims to bring balance to the body through diet and exercise.

Finding balance in your yoga practice requires products that function. "When I first went to my yoga classes, I wore a t-shirt and a pair of shorts, so then you're in downward dog and your shirt's riding up," says Watters with a rueful smile. She says that the clothing needs to work with you and not against you.

Two of the most prominent technical labels Watters carries are Karma Athletics and Tonic. Made in Vancouver, these lines use fabrics such as bamboo and spandex which are durable, high-performance textiles designed to keep the wearer comfortable. Both brands add designer touches to their pieces with mesh or intricate strap detailing, proving that you can be both practical and beautiful on and off the mat.

Zen Nomad, based and manufactured in Toronto, offers up pieces that can be worn to and from practice. Featuring dresses and tops made of materials such as bamboo and linen, this company embraces the concept of taking yoga outside the realm of physical practice, providing you with the comfort you crave coupled with a conscientious mindset. "[This line] is like 'throw it on after practice, or on the way to the studio or a yin practice,'" says Watters. She says she sometimes wears this line while teaching.

Downtown Betty, another Vancouver-based line, offers a

unique element with its yoga wear by showcasing unfinished seams. This shows the clothing is made by a person at a sewing machine. There's also an adorable bicycle decal on the bottom corner of these pieces, channeling the more casual, beach vibe for which the brand is known.

Watters says that with Downtown Betty, the intention is to make it look like you don't do yoga when you wear these clothes.

One company that Watters is particularly proud to carry is JadeYoga mats. Though manufactured in the U.S., Watters says JadeYoga's ecological practices made them a brand she wanted to promote in Halifax. Unlike many yoga mats, often made from latex, PVC or other man-made (and sometimes toxic) materials, JadeYoga mats are made of all-natural rubber, which is a plentiful and sustainable resource. Watters says that mats made with PVC can leach toxins into the body

through the skin and that yogis should pay attention to what their mats are made of before they start their practice.

Watters' first foray into yoga was when a friend dragged her to a Bikram yoga class in 1998. "I was a runner, so I couldn't touch my toes to save my life," she says.

The Bikram practice, more commonly known as hot yoga, is believed to aid in achieving yoga postures because the heat makes the muscles more relaxed and pliant. But it wasn't until discovering Ashtanga yoga that she was hooked. Moving from Vancouver to Honolulu, she met her teacher and developed her spiritual practice and became

certified to instruct.

"I think people are at this point where they're learning to take care of their well-being", she says of Halifax's recent yoga explosion.

Watters says the hot studios are drawing in the younger crowd, especially university students and young professionals, because it's an affordable and much more physical, rather than spiritual, practice.

"I always think 'the more people practicing yoga, the better the world is,'" says Watters. One way you know your yoga is working is you're a nicer person." ■



ORGANIZE A WARDROBE

From small closets to large walk ins, these organizing tips will help you keep your closet looking classy and stylish

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY
SHELBY BANKS





DIVIDE

T-shirts, long sleeves, dress shirts, pants and shorts. It sounds like a lot of work, but this tip can de-stress your wardrobe situation by making it easier for you to find what you need in a pinch.

LABEL

Place them on shelves to organize your clothing by sections and don't be afraid to get creative—labels can look classy and unique.

CUSTOMIZE

Buy or design a wardrobe that fits your clothing needs. Have places for your folded clothes, clothes that need to be hung up and a place for all of your accessories. There's nothing worse than wrinkled ties or one giant necklace ball when you're running late.

FAVES

Regularly worn items should be accessible, so place them in a spot where you can easily get to them without a struggle.

KEEP IT SEASONAL

Move your winter clothes to the back of the closet or even to another part of your home so you don't have to be reminded of that freezing time of year.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Colour code your closet—sounds simple, but it will make it easier for you to find that top you want to wear on a night out.

PACK IT AWAY

Accessorize your bedroom with trunks. These are great for hiding away anything you don't want your guests to see. Trunks come in all different sizes, colours and designs, so have some fun with it.

THINK INSIDE THE BOX

Use decorative boxes to sort out scarfs, belts or hats. This keeps your closet clean and no one will know how messy the boxes are. Use shoeboxes to save money.

DOUBLE UP

Buy double hangers so you can plan your outfit weeks ahead of time. This way you can hang up your pants, accessories and a top all on the same hanger. It's simple and looks classy while keeping you organized.

HUNG UP

Use hanging shelves if you can't install regular shelves in your closet. These are easy to attach to any hanging unit and can hold a lot of weight.

ON THE HOOK

Use hooks to hang your bags and purses. Attach the hooks to the back of your closet door. Not only will this keep you organized, but your bags won't get bent out of shape either.

RACK 'EM UP

When placing shoes in your closet, use a rack. Not into the rack? Try hangers, shelves and under-the-bed shoe storage.

DO THEY STACK UP?

Use stackable drawers to save room. You can find them anywhere. They're cost friendly and come in a range of styles.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Have a dresser drawer divider to separate your socks and underwear. Everything at your fingertips is essential first thing in the morning. Have a drawer just for accessories: watches, rings and necklaces. It'll keep things neat and help prevent scratches.

DISCARDIAN METHOD

Turn your hangers so the hook faces out towards you. As you wear each piece, place them back in the closet with the hook facing the wall. At the end of the year, what is still facing towards you is obviously not being worn. Pack up those pieces and donate them—you're completing two things at once: donating to the community and refreshing your closet. ■

GUEST WEAR

*Not sure what to wear to a summer wedding?
Finding what not to wear is half the battle.*

Alex Hackwood currently works at Prelude Concert Properties in Toronto. Although she is not a wedding planner she has been to several of weddings and has advice on what not to wear to one. Her advice centres on women, because guys have it easy. A black suit is hardly ever a bad choice, and dressing down is quick if needed.

"Try and follow the overall theme of the wedding. If the invitation has specifics included [like black tie], follow these directions as closely as possible," says Hackwood. "If you're not sure, ask—contact the bride and groom, or a member of their bridal party and double check."

Investigate and know the colours of the bridal party—you don't want to accidentally look like you're part of the show. If you know they're going to be wearing green dresses—avoid green.

Don't wear the same colour as the bride, unless told otherwise by the bride and groom. In particular, you should avoid anything white—although that can depend on whose wedding you're attending. There are some brides who chose to wear colours.

Stay inside of the dress code. This is usually brought up in the wedding invitation, so look carefully for it and if you are unsure if something will work, ask around. "If [the invitation] says a 'backyard wedding' and you show up in a ball gown, you will not only be the center of some unwanted attention, but you may feel foolish," says Hackwood.

Stay away from jeans and business attire. "The other extreme is also bad. Attending a classy wedding means you shouldn't wear what you wore to the club last week," says Hackwood. "Don't show up in anything that is too tight, short or really bright—you don't want to draw attention away from the bride."

If you can't walk in heels, don't wear heels! Choose shoes that will be both suitable and comfortable. There are heels out there that do both, you just need to be patient and look around. The same goes for your outfits, you want to be comfortable in what you're wearing.

For Hackwood's wedding, she didn't pay much attention to what everyone was wearing—she was focusing on the day. "The day goes by in a blur and I was focusing on enjoying the moment," says Hackwood.

"Weddings are an opportunity for family and friends to bring up old drama or start new ones. Unfortunately, if you are seen wearing something inappropriate, you may end up the talk of the town and not in a good way." ■



A Photo Essay by Brandon Young

**WORDS BY SHELBY BANKS
PHOTO BY JILLIAN MORGAN**

Why subscribe to a singular style of dress or attitude when you can be authentically you? Why let the ever-changing ride of fashion industry dictation influence your fashion choices? Why not be normal down to your socks?

The Associated Press' Stylebook recently noted the 2014 normcore trend—which saw many twenty-something's dressing up (or down) in mundanely bland clothes akin to characters of popular 90s sitcom *Seinfeld*.

The Associated Press's definition: "Normcore: A fashion trend that combines 'normal' and 'hardcore' and is characterized by unpretentious, unisex,

average dressing."

With this recent definition, it's a perfect time to explore the philosophy of a trend that is still influencing fashion today.

In a time when image consciousness can cause us to disengage from the self, the muted ethos of normcore can help to downplay self-image and encourage a purer sense of identity. By wearing the most basic clothing, we cease to be advertisements for a lifestyle and more authentic human beings.

Stop looking for yourself: You're right here. ■

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY BRANDON YOUNG





Left: Hat by Nike, Top by H&M, Jacket by Tradition, Jeans by
Levi's
Right: Jacket by Calvin Klein, Shirt by Gap, Belt (vintage),
Jeans by American Apparel

Sartorial Sorcerer

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY BRANDON YOUNG

Introducing Toban Ralston, the Halifax designer casting a spell on the runway

Skeletons, monsters and the word “slut” fill my field of vision. But it’s okay. These are just images and words pinned to a vision board. Since last Summer, these thoughts that have been swirling around inside the brain of fashion designer Toban Ralston.

“I think my interest in the magical is something that I use both literally, but also a little more abstractly, in that idea of being more than human,” he says. Looking at Ralston, the word “dark” does not come to mind. Today he’s smiling, bubbly and full of chuckles. He appears more mannequin than occult worshipper standing at a slim 6’1”, which is ideal as he is his own fitting model.

“I definitely design with guys in mind, but that’s mostly because I’m a guy,” he says. “It’s a much easier route if it’s just something I can throw on and try and see how it’s looking.”

With an upcoming show featuring three of his collections, he’s been sewing, stitching and assembling the elements of his vision. However, it’s his gothic streetwear collection and ideas surrounding unisexuality in apparel, transformation via fashion and self-referentialism through products that are of interest.



Ever since being asked to model for this collection a year ago, I've been in and out of Ralston's fitting room, trying on outfits that appear to have been born out of a dream. "So you'll just walk to the end, pose and turn around. But lift your back leg before you turn," he says, demonstrating during an impromptu runway lesson.

It's been fascinating to watch Ralston's thought process, distilling his visions and opinions into four ensembles that will make their way down a runway in the course of five minutes.

One of the overarching themes in this collection is that it's designed to be attractive to people of both gender in the sense that physicality doesn't dictate what is available to the wearer. "I'm definitely aiming for a person with a particular aesthetic preference rather than a particular body shape," he says.

Never one to conform to the gender-binary divide, a younger Ralston made himself at home on both sides of the retail sales floors. "I remember when I started getting interested in dressing more the way that I wanted to dress and having my own personal style," he says. "I wanted to wear things that were tighter than what I could find in the men's section." Women's denim in particular was what he gravitated towards—the less boxy fit agreeing more with his leaner frame.

Conveniently, the menswear industry has evolved to offer a variety of denim options. Today, Ralston is wearing a comfortably snug pair of black Levi's 511's, which he's paired with a plain, grey pullover and boots. Understated but functional. "They're the same as yours—just in black," laughs Ralston when I ask about where I can find a pair of his charcoal-bathed, matte, Timberland kicks.

Observing his style head to toe, he accessorizes with neckwear associated with the occult and mythology. The last time I saw him, he was sporting a pentagram. Today, an Egyptian symbol is hanging from his neck ... is it simply a fashion statement or something more complex? "I've always liked witchy, mythical things



"In our non-magical reality, fashion is an avenue of transformation..."

... Within those fantasy worlds there are frequently characters who can shift between genders or transform in one way or another," he says. "In our non-magical reality, fashion is an avenue of transformation and how we can live beyond the boundaries that society might otherwise present to us."

With society constantly moving towards equality for the sexes, there couldn't be a more opportune moment for a designer like Ralston to come along. "There is, in the air, a feeling that a change is coming in the fashion industry," he says, "particularly with models and more designers intentionally designing unisex collections."

Fabrics and patterns like jacquard, plaid, mesh and even a cute emoji are amongst the materials heavily used in this collection. But it's the use of neoprene that is most interesting. The sleek, semi-shine coupled with the soft, yet durable fabric adds another dimension of duality to Ralston's collection.

He asks if I want to try the look on, as the model who was supposed to wear it had to drop out of the show. Oversized leather shorts, a tank top, and black sweater—this is the epitome of street-chic. The designs aren't complete just yet though; there will be some personal touches that will add character and make it 100 per cent Toban Ralston.

"Three-three-three is actually my birthday," says 30-year-old Ralston of the 333 numerical design that will adorn a top that will be featured in his show. "There's a lot of dark, deadly elements to it, but in cute, quirky ways. I've got skulls, ghosts, and things like that, but they're the fun kind rather than the scary kind."

As for the neoprene top, Ralston has the phrase "Hades is my homeboy" in mind for that, once again incorporating a mythical sensibility.

Ralston's collection speaks to the need for autonomy; no matter where that comes from or how it is presented. Whether you're a "goth-lumberjack" like Ralston or a jeans-and-t-shirt type, it's all about taking control of your style and curating pieces that complete your look. ■



THE ULTIMATE
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STYLE CONSIGNED

*The second-hand shopping experience thrives
in downtown Halifax. Is something in the air?*

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JILLIAN MORGAN



Maureen Court knows style. She sorts through a collection of gently-used clothes and scarves—some high-end and some low-end—but all treasures to Court. After ironing each item, she attaches a price tag.

"Some days I sell what I think are all my best pieces in here and I'll think, 'I'll never get a good piece again'," says Court. "And the next day, in it comes."

Court is owner of Elsie's Used Clothing, a colourful, two-floor consignment shop on Halifax's Queen Street. Inside, every inch of real estate is accounted for, even the ceiling where tapestries hang. She's decorated the shop with sofas, plants, string lights and funky lamps, but her customer's come for the collection of new-to-them shoes, jewelry, accessories and clothes.

"When people come in here it feels like they're in a comfortable, unique environment and it makes them feel creative and unique," says Court. "You don't get any of that in a mall."

Consignment shops differ from thrift stores such as Frenchy's or Value Village because they curate their products. Top brands, one-of-a-kind items, or vintage clothing and accessories are the most sought after. Shops sell their products at a discounted price and the original owner will typically receive a percentage of the sale.

"To follow the trends and just wear what the magazines are telling you to wear ... well, most people can't afford that stuff anyway," says Court. "But it's kind of boring."

Elsie's is just one of the consignment shops in downtown Halifax. An annual influx of university students to the seven campuses in the city puts these businesses in the centre of their target market—a young, price sensitive

population. But these shops also reflect the style and values of Haligonians.

"I've lived in Toronto, I've lived in London, I've lived in many different cities and Halifax definitely has more than a lot of these [stores], if not the most that I've seen," says Dan Shaw, lecturer of marketing and director of Dalhousie University's corporate residency Masters of Business Administration program.

Shaw says high-end re-sale is attractive for many shoppers in Nova Scotia, where the average household income is \$42,647—about \$6,000 less than the national average.

"People still want to look good, but don't want to pay an arm and a leg or be held hostage [to] spending a huge amount of their income on clothing," says Shaw.

Lindsey Ward works at Brilliant Clothing Boutique, a consignment shop just one street over from Elsie's. She says there's no lack of fashionable clothes in Halifax. "I just think it's something that's understated here," says Ward. "Nobody goes around shouting their brand."

Brilliant Clothing Boutique is more streamlined than its neighbour. Clothes are arranged by colour story and style. A wall of neutrals is brightened with a bright, pink Rebecca Minkoff wallet—one of the many brands the store carries, including Christian Louboutin, Michael Kors, Rag & Bone, Current/Elliott, Auxiliary, AllSaints, Free People and more.

"It makes people feel really good to know they're getting something at a discounted price that's still not diminishing the brand in any way," says Ward.

Ward has worked with the store's owner, Stacey Thompson, for over four years. She says she's learned that her clientele wants what's stylish, not what's



trendy. "Halifax really is trying to become a more cultural, fashionable hub."

Olivia Hughes shops consignment for one-of-a-kind fashion to suit her self-identified "tom-boy, rocker-chic, hippie" style. She says she isn't swayed by brands.

"When you're shopping consignment, you find better quality things, so I'm willing to pay a little more," says Hughes. "At the mall, everything's so cheaply made these days."

Penelope MacAuley owns Penelope's Boutique, a shop located in Halifax's North End. She says her customers prefer to avoid the "cookie-cutter" feel of malls and traditional retail outlets that offer multiples of the same item.

"Although a lot of these things in their time were mass produced, they've stood the test of time because of the quality," says MacAuley. "They've stood the test of time because of the style and you're not going to find too many of them around anymore."

MacAuley's clients travel to fashionable cities around the world such as London, Paris, Rome and from cities in the United States to bring back brand names not available in Halifax.

Maureen Court says Elsie's Used Clothing only takes clothes that have stood the test of time.

"Unfortunately, now those pieces are too expensive for most people to afford. I'm really proud that I can offer that quality for quite a bit less," she says. ■

The terms "second-hand", "used", "thrifted" and "vintage" can carry weight. But for many, the hunt for clothes in these shops is somewhere between a choice and a necessity.

"There's a whole group of young people who just want to find 'the cheaper, the better,' because they're so cool they can almost make anything look good. It doesn't matter if they spend two dollars on their t-shirt or find it in the garbage bin on the way to work," says Maureen Court, owner of Elsie's Used Clothing.

Second-hand shopping became popular in Nova Scotia among young people in the 80's, she says. "Style isn't about having the money to buy the clothes in the store. It's a unique, personal thing. We have more people in this city that will do that in a unique, interesting way than anywhere I've ever seen."



INTERVIEW WITH A GENTLEMAN

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JESSE LAUFER

Some people like to keep things old-school. Douglas Morum is one of those people. The 20-year-old is an economics and computer sciences student at Dalhousie University. He moved to Canada from London, England in 2007. Though young, Morum is trying to bring back chivalry and gentlemanly-ness to Halifax. Most men his age don't openly advocate for traditional manners, lifestyles and fashions. Intrigued by his ambition—and his Bond-styled accent—we sat down with Morum to talk about what drives him to imitate classic 007 style

Q Do you consider yourself a gentleman?
A Pseudo gentleman.

Q Can you elaborate?
A When you think of gentlemen you think of Daniel Craig, Sean Connery and stuff like that. I'm still trying to transfer over completely from my boyhood. In my opinion, one of the main things about being a gentleman is having your priorities and responsibilities handled. I'm still working on that.

Q Define a gentleman.
A Eloquence, well educated, kind but reserved, good taste in clothes, holds and presents himself well, has a good moral code, takes care of themselves, has their financial matters in order, ambitious, doesn't brag.

Q Can you describe eloquence for me?
A It's a sense of quiet, confident grace in the way they speak, the way they hold themselves. I know eloquence is usually for speech, but I think it would be transferable to other aspects of life.

Q What sort of style does a gentleman have?
A Now that's somewhere you can be quite versatile. It's about clean clothes, well fitting—doesn't have to be the most expensive but it has to look good. Wear what looks good for you.

Q What about shoes?
A I would say usually my standard is a pair of good black dress shoes. A pair of stylish boots—Blundstones or Timberlands. Nothing too flashy. Then a pair of semi-dress brown shoes, ones that you can get re-tailored and re-soled.



Q How much should you spend on shoes?

A Well, with only needing three pairs of shoes, they need to be good and last a long time. You want to aim for like \$200, but if they're on sale, all the power to you. Not necessarily looking for the price, but looking for the quality is what matters.

Q What would you consider a quality jean?

A Tommy Hilfiger and up. From experience, you go and buy yourself a pair of Hollister jeans and a pair of like, Lacoste or Tommy's—even Armani Emporium—see how long they last compared to each other.

Q How often, and where, do you suit up?

A Once a week, usually for dinners, or if I'm going downtown; to set myself apart from the rest. I like wearing a suit because it makes me feel good. It gives me confidence.

Q It has to be well-fitted?

A Yes, of course. This isn't the 1980's where your pants could also second for ship sails.

Q Tell me about your first suit.

A Absolutely god-awful! Mis-matched pants and an oversized Perry Ellis jacket from The Bay. It was very large, too broad in the shoulders. You could probably fit a small human being as well as me in there. The pants weren't tailored; they'd drag under my shoes.

Q What are the benefits of living "gentlemanly"?

A A lot more friends, a lot more respect, a greater sense of fulfillment. I was trying to conform to what I thought people liked. Once I stopped doing that and started accepting myself, then I became a lot happier. Having your own style and actual life that you enjoy what you want to do and not what you think people think you want to do is when you start becoming more of a gentleman.

Q Do you have to conform?

A Well, in society we require some degree of conformity. I guess, when you are trying to be a gentleman, you are conforming to an idea. Now mind you, the concept of [the gentleman] is quite malleable. You kind of put your own "tag" if you will, on it. But yeah, I think it requires a certain degree of conformity.

Q Can anyone be a gentleman?

A I think that everyone has the potential to be a gentleman, but, it takes a lot of self-motivation and self-control. A lot of people lack that nowadays.

Q Are there a lot of gentleman?

A There's a few. What makes a gentleman special is that there aren't many of us.

This interview was edited for clarity and brevity. ■



A CLASS OF ITS OWN

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JESSE LAUFER



Humphrey Bogart's go-to drink still remains the king of beverages—Scotch. The *Casablanca* star reportedly loved Scotch right to the end—even though it may have caused his death. It's expensive. There are hundreds of varieties. And because of its complexity on the palate, a \$100 bottle will taste different to everyone—meaning it can be a daunting drink to become acquainted with.

The Scotch world is daunting. Here's how to break in

There is inexpensive Scotch, but to really learn what the beverage has to offer you'll want to look at the \$40-\$70 price range of Single Malts.

The first bottle that came to Taylor William's mind was Bowmore 12 Year Old. "That's what I give to most people who want to venture into that whole peaty, smokey area" says William, bartender at one of Halifax's Scotch spots, The Loose Cannon.

"Smoke and peat are two different profiles, people tend to get them confused," he says. "But they do go hand in hand in a lot of Whiskeys. It's very nice and well balanced". A Single Malt from the Islay (pronounced "EYE-LUH" region of Scotland, a bottle of Bowmore costs \$55.99—with tax—in Nova Scotia, but it can often be found on sale.

NOT A BOYS CLUB


Like Bogart, Robin Scherbatsky—star character from *How I Met Your Mother*—is another famous Scotch drinker. One of her most famous lines is "I love a Scotch that's old enough to drink its own Scotch".

What keeps people away from Scotch is the stigma. According to William, it's still viewed as "a bit of an old boy's club."

But Scotch isn't just a guy's drink—William says he has just as many women sitting at his bar as men. And the best reason to get into Scotch? According to William, it's the drink's culture and Nova Scotia's heritage. This is New Scotland after all.

"It's something that there's so much rich history behind, especially at this side of the country where a lot of our history comes from Scottish and Irish roots," says William. "Once you finally dive into it and you start getting into the Whiskey, it starts opening up other doors. You start researching different things about it, there's so much science and passion behind it and the different regions where it comes from."

According to William, most people get into Scotch between their early to mid-twenties—and like with Bogart, it stays with them. "It's a big thing. Once you're a Scotch drinker, you always are," he explains. "I once had a 96-year-old Scottish woman in a wheelchair in here drinking double Lagavulin neat. I bought her first one, then she drank two more."



GET INTO THESE

Bowmore 12 Year Old Scotch
NSLC \$55.99

Auch Auchentoshan Three Wood Single Malt Scotch
NSLC \$69.99

Lagavulin 16 Year Old Scotch
NSLC \$124.99

REJUVENATE
REVIVE
RESTORE



At Ease

DRINKS

Around The Clock

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY
JESSE LAUFER AND BRANDON YOUNG

DAY

Orange Tea Latte

Pairs well with a bright morning full of open windows and excitement for the day ahead

- 1 ½ tsp black tea
- 1 tsp grated orange peel
- ½ cup milk
- 2 tsp sugar

Brew half a cup of tea for three to five minutes. Add sugar to brewed tea. Combine milk and orange peel in steaming pitcher and steam until desired temperature is reached. Using a strainer, pour milk into tea. Top off with residual foam and enjoy.



NIGHT

Haskapa Blueberry Smash

Take in the best Nova-Scotia has to offer with Fisherman's Helper Rum, distilled in Trenton, N.S.. Combined with local blueberries and haskapa juice, this cocktail hits all the right notes.

- 1 ½ oz. white rum
- 1 Tbsp fresh Nova Scotia blueberries
- 1 oz. Haskapa syrup
- 2 oz. blueberry syrup

Add rum and roughly 1 Tbsp. of fresh blueberries to shaker. Muddle heavily. Add Haskapa and blueberry syrups. Fill ½ of sling glass with ice, then add fresh blueberries. Top with ice. Shake and strain cocktail into sling. Slowly top with soda water.

Nova Scotia Red Berry Sangria

What's the best part of living in one of the more beautiful parts of the country? Patio time. This recipe is guaranteed to keep you outside, hydrated and happy. Requires a large pitcher or sangria vessel.

- 1 cup assorted berries
- 1 cup white cranberry juice
- 1 cup cranberry or raspberry juice
- 1 ½ cup Lunenburg County Blueberry Wine
- soda water

Cut larger berries, and toss together. Add to pitcher with juices and wine. Stir and leave covered for at least two hours (overnight is better).

Pour over ice, leaving desired room for soda water. Add soda water slowly.

Add sweetener to taste, if desired.

Optional, but always fun: float 1 oz. of Ironworks Blueberry Liqueur, Cranberry Liqueur, or Apple Brandy for added taste and colour layers. Also try playing with different types or cuts of fruits when making sangria to create colour layers.

At Ease





“ Working in retail you get a ton of exposure to womenswear (sections). Sometimes those would have the fun things that you’d want to throw on. Conversely, I saw girls always perusing the men’s section. ”
-Toban Ralston

VERSO Outtake, March 2016

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