

Is Toronto too small for designer Andres Majtenyi?

By Mike Brassard

Blue. It's the piercing blue eyes that seize you the very moment you meet award winning clothing designer and King West resident Andrew Majtenyi.

Their intensity bores right into the soul. Only the laughter in his voice and the softness in his body language save you from utter domination.

His words are equally intense. "I want to be the next Galliano. I want to influence and set the direction. I want to push the envelope. I want people to go 'Wow!' when they see my stuff," Majtenyi enthuses. "I believe I have something to share with the world."

Everything he has done to date has that goal in mind. From mounting two fashion shows per year, often paid from his own pocket, developing and expanding a widening circle of contacts in the fashion and the advertising world, pressing his message to anyone who will listen, and organizing and hosting numerous parties and gatherings to bring people together to talk about him, about his fashion and his plans, Majtenyi is driven by his terms.

His is a huge reach in a world awash in fashion and the cult of the celebrity, where design is reduced to a commodity, not the art form that Majtenyi believes it is. Majtenyi is aware of the challenges. With a global purchasing juggernaut homogenizing fashion into one line for the planet, where costs from fabrics to manufacture to design are cut through the bone, the chances for an individual designer making their mark are virtually non-existent.

Leaning forward and grasping your arm, those eyes boring through you, Majtenyi emphasizes that fact. "I know people get 'discovered,' but they have been around for 10 years."

He continues, "Galliano was at the right place at the right time. He was told he was amazing, and was led to believe he was amazing, but... he pauses, "Alex MacQueen of Isabella Blow bought his first collection. He sighs and adds, "Today, it is so hard to do something new."

Lightning struck those designers. How can a Niagara-neighbourhood designer get lightning to strike again?

Majtenyi has done it all, with an academic background not only in fashion design, but also in marketing. As the house designer for Toronto

casual clothing manufacturer Brÿzer with one or two collections per year, and with his experience in film and in theatre costume and wardrobe design, Majtenyi seems to have it made.

Despite his hard work, commercial success and public attention elude him. Still, he is determined to succeed. "Focus!" Majtenyi says, "Stay focused, this experience can bring a lot to the table."

But focus is very hard for a one-man entity. "I spend 90% of my time marketing and 10% designing," Majtenyi baldly states. "It should be 90% designing and 10% marketing."

Keeping the name out there is Majtenyi's major challenge. A recent Design Exchange award helped a little. "People started returning my calls and emails," he admits.

He tried building on that with a huge party at Habitat, the edgy Queen Street West nightclub-restaurant that reflects his designs. A lot of fashion industry people, instructors, and advertising people turned up, ate some food, mingled, chatted up a storm and congratulated Majtenyi for his winning designs.

But will that translate into a fashion line? Will that bring him closer to his vision?

Majtenyi admits, "I have to be a businessman. Fashion design has no

money unless you're in textile design."

Majtenyi does it all to get his message out. There is no massive machine behind him. "And I have saleable clothes on my rack," Majtenyi says. "I'm selling an experience and branding. I'm getting sponsors slowly. Stone by stone, I'm moving the mountain."

How many stones does that mountain have, and how much time does Majtenyi have to move them? Building his contact list and hosting his parties and shows is only the start. Finding money to mount them is the next. Designing the items is almost forgotten, as negotiating a venue, the models, advertising and promotion, the guest list, and track-

ing down the no replies consume most of his energy.

"I design my shows as mixed media. A show should be a show." Everything he does says design. No one who received the suede colonial Canada map invitation that Majtenyi created for Brÿzer's March 2003 Show will ever forget it. Majtenyi's Autumn/winter 2005 etched steel plate invitation is another memorable RSVP.

Several times Majtenyi brought his vision (and his clothing) to global fashion mecca London. "Each time they said, 'Go to Milan, go to Milan,'" he sighs. To see his work, visit www.andrewmajtenyi.com.



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