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Chasing Luxury



by *Grandin Donovan*

Jerry Tam is a bright-eyed boy from Butte, and an enthused grin never fades from beneath his red-dyed cowlick bangs. He debuts the first full season of his fledgling label, Form, between consumer powerhouse Calvin Klein and couture firebrand Zac Posen. "Suicide?" he quips, "I don't know."

CHASING LUXURY

Growing up with four older sisters, Tam admits he's always been "chasing the luxury." He moved to New York to pursue fashion, studying at Parsons, receiving FIT's haute couture certification and learning such "old world knowledge," he says, as "sharpening my scissors with my hair oil." Tam began paying industry dues

under Tara Subkoff of Imitation of Christ, and a year later a chance meeting on 7th Avenue landed him a job with Patrick Robinson, then of Perry Ellis. Eventually assisting with prints, wovens, and knits, Tam still gushes over his apprenticeship. "[Robinson] taught me what it was like to be a designer, to play that role, to speak eloquently, to like the luxury, and to always understand it's about the craft," he says. Tam's next step as studio manager for Zac Posen was all the experience he needed to launch Form.



LEAP OF FAITH

After a changing of guard at Posen, Tam decided to strike out on his own. "Zac's clothes are brilliant, but I wanted to do something different," he says. "I'm more of a downtown person." And downtown is where he went. Working every angle, Tam got a SoHo space, some backing, and decided, "let's do it on smoke and mirrors." His first season featured a soft palette, domestic fabrics, and springtime staples like chiffon couture dresses, windbreakers with cutaway panels, and hot pants. Tam had "only a month to do it, and no resources, so it's really about the design."

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Tam designed the latest season in the last two months, and explains it in ambitious terms. "There will be no sampling," he says, "from pencil to paper, to garment—that's the new paradigm of Form." Sketches of his entire season fill the wall behind him, tacked up with swatches of the fabrics destined for each. "What you're seeing is 70 new designs." His studio team turns each illustration into a flat, and both go to the sample-maker, "the same guy doing Marc and Karl Lagerfeld, so the quality is that good," says Tam.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

"This season...half is white and cream and bone colors—the pristine aspects of life—but then we're doing a dark side, which represents the morbid side of fashion and life." The binary is simple enough, but as each piece has its double the results are versatile and appealing. One pair

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of coats in boiled wool—a fabric he says, “most people wouldn’t touch at a show”—has a voluminous collar that is commanding in both light and dark. “We want to be able to present two lifestyles with the same style.”

**SECOND COLLECTION**

Tam is excited about his winter collection because, “being from Montana, it’s all about warmth and cold and layering.” He points out a trenchcoat featuring many elements from his spring collection—asymmetry, double lapels, inside-out pockets, and pockets that come off the hip. “This is a signature piece,” he says, “no one has ever combined all this craziness and still had it look like a wearable garment.” Another standout is a grey overcoat with inverted pleating that gathers at lobster clasps, which Tam says was inspired by “tiered lotus petals.” He also has a clutch of accessories, including pony hide wineskin purses, and thick braided-wool scarves with pendulous Swarovski fringes.

OPEN FUTURE

Being new has its advantages. Not yet knowing his market, Tam says, “I have no restrictions—I get to do all groups, from basics to outerwear to couture.” Tam’s racks tout diverse styles for different markets. A black skirt suit “is obviously Bergdorf’s,” he says, but “there’s little, more artistic boutiques like Seven that we want to cater to, too.” He pulls out two puffy pleated skirts with elastic hems—one in basic black wool, the other in a foamy Japanese veined wool. “What’s best is that we can take really crazy fabric to appeal to that market, and then take regular wool and appeal to a different crowd.”

Excited as he is by his upcoming show, Tam remains focused. “Hype, celebrity, fame—this is not what this is about, it’s about the clothes,” he says. “Keep it honest, and follow the rules.”

www.jerrytam.com

Form shows in the Angel Orensanz Center, 172 Norfolk Street, at 6:30PM on February 9.
 Sony Jive presents *The Living Things*.

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