

Fur + fine fabrics are fab for Norman Ambrose

BY DANIELLE RENDA

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Norman Ambrose is a connoisseur of fur and fine fabrics – one who goes to great lengths to please his clientele.

Since founding his eponymous brand in 2007, he's created hundreds of exquisite pieces, ranging from the "simple" trench coat or bolero jacket to the ultra complex, machine-washable, beaded cocktail dress or intricately hand-embroidered evening gown.

But no matter the task, Ambrose and his team tackle it with ingenuity.

"Creating custom garments for a client's lifestyle is about the fantasy at heart and, on that level, nothing seems unusual," he says. "That's the whole concept behind what I do and what makes the job so interesting on a daily basis."

Ambrose uses only fine materials for his pieces, including luxurious furs like mink, sable, chinchilla, broadtail, silky lamb and fox. Style meets practicality as his outerwear is designed for women with active lifestyles.

"The ability for her to wear my designs in her life is paramount," he says. "I use natural materials like fur, cashmere and silk, and my designs have a specific function to protect her from the natural elements, like the cold, snow and rain."

His current best seller is a reversible raincoat that combines water-repellent fabric with fur for a functional yet fresh look – a project that takes



Norman Ambrose. Courtesy Norman Ambrose.

approximately two weeks, from sketch to completion, and requires about 15 measurements. This is on the shorter spectrum of time for Ambrose's creations, as embroidered gowns require some three to five weeks to ensure a perfect fit. He mentions a particular evening gown that required upwards of 50 measurements due to its elaborate embroidery.

The machine-washable cocktail dress mentioned earlier also proved laborious, he says.

"One might think that it's an easy challenge," he says. "But when you're dealing with fine-hand beading and couture fabrics, the extreme conditions of washing and drying machines is like a rock to a glass window."

Apart from his extraordinary skill, his uncompromising client commitment is what sets Ambrose apart from other designers.

"I love women and want them to feel their most beautiful, youthful and confident selves wearing my creations," he says.

This devotion was instilled by two very important women in his life – his mother and grandmother.

"The women in my life, my mother and grandmother to be specific, inspired my designs by way of example," he says. "They shopped for quality over quantity and instilled the notion that dressing in proper-fitting, comfortable, well-made garments projected confidence and good taste."

His pieces embody this by functioning as "vehicles for his clients to feel enchanted in their own worlds," he says, and carry themselves confidently throughout their day-to-day lives.

By the time the San Francisco-born Ambrose became interested in design at the age of 12, he had already developed a love of nature. He recalls watching his mother tirelessly cultivate her outdoor garden, which boasted beautiful flower beds arranged in picturesque patterns that sharply contrasted with the monochromatic Marin Hills.

So it comes as no surprise that nature served as the inspiration for his latest collection, *Order in Chaos*.

"Nature is a continual and very important inspiration through its exotic diversity of flora and fauna, vibrant colors and the elements," he says. "In any chaotic situation, there is always a natural order to be found."

To illustrate the concept of chaos, Ambrose uses intarsia, a knitting technique for multicolored patterns. At first glance, the pattern may look fragmented, he says, but with closer inspection, it appears both repetitious and orderly.

He compares this to a snowflake.

"No two snowflake patterns are alike," he says. "Each one is uniquely different and the number of them is infinite. From a mathematical perspective, an infinite, never-ending question is chaotic, in that it is impossible to measure or calculate. From an artistic point of view, a snowstorm is beautiful and romantic."

The collection's standout piece is the "Kaleidoscope" coat, created using nearly 1,000 individual pieces of fabric sewn together using the intarsia process for a modern yet vintage feel.

"Confident, carefree and vibrant," Ambrose says. "It's all rooted in living her fantasy in style." ❧

Norman Ambrose is available at Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue. For more, visit normanambrose.com.