

Althea Harper

Althea Harper is a trooper. She did this interview sniffing and sneezing, because Harper literally stressed herself sick preparing for New York Fashion Week this September 9 through 16. As a runner-up on season 6 of *Project Runway*, Harper already showed her first complete collection at the reality competition's Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week show, earning praise from some of the industry's most influential designers.

Today Harper is juggling two full-time jobs: designing for both her eponymous line and her eco-friendly, affordable collection, Sittella. Her Althea Harper fall 2010 collection, titled Fatalistic Futurism, hails the Futurist movement of the 1910s when speed, technology and progress were worshipped as the wave of the future. She explains how the collection embodies Futurism by "taking bold shapes and placing them around the hips or the waist to frame a woman's body." She also challenged herself to construct pieces using unexpected combinations of materials — think leather, jersey, high-end silks, mesh and spandex. The silhouettes reflect classy, timeless fashion with knee-length skirts and dresses that look great on any frame. "I look better in something that covers the knees," says Harper.

As a female designer, Harper draws not only from her own preferences, but also those of her girlfriends. She has heard many women complain about exposed knees, elbows or upper arms. Her solution? Create pieces that remedy the common insecurities of women and celebrate their sexuality at the same time.

Harper insists that the versatility of her designs go beyond a women in her 20s and 30s, and that style means clothes that fit. "There are a lot of body standards and you think you have to be really small [to wear the designs]," she says. "It's empowering when you're able to dress and show [your curves] off, to wear something fitted. It's about confidence and how you come across to people."



Harper predicts a surge of knits for fall and winter. "Knitwear is amazing because it conforms to your body and is very comfortable, but can also be very luxurious," explains Harper. "You're going to see it used in new ways like dresses and jeans." Althea Harper's Lorenzo dress is a perfect representation of her work: it vibrates with color, but its statement is made through a one-shoulder knit sleeve. This little number captured Kourtney Kardashian's eye, who now proclaims undying allegiance to Harper's designs.

As of late, Harper has been transitioning to the pace of New York with expertise. She draws inspiration from her surroundings, noting the enterprise with which New Yorkers express their fashion aesthetic. She observes, "It's about being sharp and being different, almost like an artist. Even if you're working in the business area, you still want to come across as an intellectual through art."

How she has time to sleep is beyond us, but hopefully her stress-provoked flu evaporates by the time Fashion Week rears its gorgeous head.