

SEISMIC SHIFT

Can L.A. do to New York what New York once did to Paris? A new generation of designers and artists pushes the creative center of gravity to the West Coast.

—By Mary Kaye Schilling—

RICHARD MELVILLE HALL—KNOWN PROFESSIONALLY AS Moby—moved to L.A. in 2010. A week in, the New York native found himself wondering whether relocating had been an enormous mistake. L.A. felt immense and disconnected. To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, there was no there there.

And then he was invited to dinner. The evening was hosted by German publishers Benedikt and Angelika Taschen at their landmark house, Chemosphere, designed by John Lautner. You’ve seen it in films and iconic images of L.A.: a modernist octagon suspended over the Hollywood Hills like a spaceship. The Taschens were celebrating the Japanese architect Tadao Ando, and it turned out to be both a fabulous party and a quintessential L.A. evening. “First of all, to get to Benedikt’s house you drive along Mulholland Drive, through what feels like deepest country, except that you can see the lights of the city below,” Moby says. “And then I walked into one of the most remarkable homes I’ve ever been in, where the guests included not only my favorite living architect but David Hockney and Jim Heimann, a local historian who gleefully told me horrifying stories about L.A.’s seedy past, like the Black Dahlia murder. It made me truly appreciative of the uniqueness of the city.”

That peculiar combination of glamour and grit has always defined L.A.’s style: sunshine and its flipside, noir. But in the 1960s and ’70s the center of Los Angeles veered west, toward the ocean, and suddenly it was all about good vibrations. “Hollywood was as far east as people would go,” says *Los Angeles Times* fashion critic Booth Moore of that time. “By the early ’90s you had the clichéd veneer of the 1991 film *L.A. Story*. To the rest of the country, Angelenos were self-interested bimbos living in car bubbles, cruising from yoga to juice bars.”

Around about 2000, that started to change, with the incremental revival of neighborhoods farther east: Hollywood, Silver Lake, Echo Park, and, particularly, downtown, which has exploded in the past few years into a flourishing center for design, fashion, art, and dining. “That geographical evolution,” Moore says, “and the greater emphasis on darker urbanity rather than the light, beach-driven aesthetic has given the city not only much-needed street cred, it’s giving L.A. legitimacy as a style and cultural center.”

“L.A. always feels like it’s in a state of becoming, with an amazing sense of optimism,” says art dealer Shaun Caley Regen, who moved west in 1989. “At the same time there’s very little regard for history, as in, ‘If you don’t like it, tear it down!’” Such irreverence, local designers say, opens the door to a more expansive creative environment, with fewer rules and precedents. “There’s a Wild West mentality here: It’s messy and fresh and risk-taking,” says Simon Haas, who, with his twin brother Nikolai, creates strikingly original furniture, among other things, in their downtown studio. “It’s more free than anywhere else I’ve lived,” adds Nikolai. “There’s no expectation on artists here, and no obligation to archaic systems of living or expressing. In most other cities you’re given a formula of how you’re expected to behave to become successful.”

Kate and Laura Mulleavy established their fashion label, Rodarte, in 2005, kicking off a new wave of serious L.A.-based fashion. And by never

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—The— MUSES OF 90027

Nathalie and Laura Love

ACTRESS; MODEL

The sisters (*standing*) grew up in Los Feliz and were tutored in fashion by their mother, *Vogue* editor Lisa Love. **What is L.A. style?** Laura: “Comfort above all.” True, says Nathalie, but “I try not to wear exercise clothes to lunch. That’s lazy.” **Favorite designer:** Nathalie: “Rodarte. There is nothing like having a sister be your best friend, like me and Laura. And I like the way their clothes tell a story.” Laura: “Scott Sternberg, Jen Meyer, and J.C. Obando.” **Classic film:** Laura: “*Clueless*. I watched it with my sister a thousand times.” **Classic song:** Nathalie: “‘Last Nite,’ by the Strokes, always reminds me of driving around Hollywood, getting up to no good.” **Favorite restaurants:** Nathalie: “Sqirl for breakfast, Shibuchō for sushi, and Pacific Dining Car for old-school charm.”

—The— COUTURIERS OF RAD

Laura and Kate Mulleavy

FOUNDERS OF RODARTE

Laura (*far left*) and Kate (*far right*) Mulleavy, with Nathalie (*in pink*) and Laura Love. On the Mulleavys, **The Row** blouses (\$790 each). On the Loves, **Rodarte** dresses and jewelry.





Nikolai (*left*) and Simon Haas, in the lobby of the Ace Hotel, in front of the reception desk they designed. On Nikolai, Dior Homme jacket (\$5,500); John Varvatos T-shirt (\$198); Emporio Armani jeans (\$155); Jimmy Choo sneakers (\$795). On Simon, Dior Homme suit (\$3,500) and tie (\$220); Hugo Boss shirt (\$165); Jimmy Choo shoes (\$725).

— *The* —
« DESIGN MAVERICKS

Nikolai and Simon Haas

STUDIO ARTISTS

The twin brothers from Austin (younger siblings of actor Lukas) moved to L.A. in 2007, quickly becoming the go-to furniture and fabric designers for such clients as Versace, Lady Gaga, and the Ace Hotel. **Describe your work:** Simon: “Anthropomorphic objects, a scientific approach to material, experimentation, and not worrying about where we fit in design history.” **What is L.A. style?** Nikolai: “Hedi Slimane, Greg Chait, the Rodarte sisters, N.W.A., Warren Beatty, Anna Nicole Smith. It’s based on the individual, not the city.”

Favorite L.A. interior: Simon: “Architect John Lautner’s Segel House, with its crazy swooping wooden ceiling and huge plate-glass wall.

Lautner made you feel like part of the environment. The beach actually looks more enticing from inside.” **Local hero:** Simon: “If I could model my life on anything, it would be David Hockney’s canyon lifestyle—especially his pool boys!” **Favorite L.A. memory:**

Nikolai: “Visiting Lukas at 12, driving Mulholland in his convertible, Stevie Wonder’s ‘Misstra Know-It-All’ on repeat, eating a Poquito Más burrito.”

— *The* —
GREAT BEAUTY »

Liberty Ross

MODEL, DESIGNER

The London native, 10-year L.A. resident, and former top model is about to launch her first design capsule: six pieces for the denim brand Genetic. **How does L.A. compare with London?** “In London, culture and history are all around you. You have to delve a bit deeper to find what interests you here. But that’s also what makes it exciting.” **Favorite designer:** “Jeremy Scott. He captures the fun of this town. And I love Lisa Eisner’s jewelry.” **Classic song:** “Anything by Lana Del Rey. She expresses L.A. beautifully.” **Favorite restaurant:** “Gjelina, in Venice.” **Where should every visitor go?** “Paradise Cove, for a magical walk along the beach.”

Lanvin blouse (\$1,990), skirt (\$2,615), and hat (\$2,890); LaCrasia gloves (\$400); Gabriele Colangelo fur muff (\$750); Christian Louboutin shoes (\$1,295); David Webb earrings (\$51,500) and rings (from \$21,000).





— *The* —
INDIE MINSTRELS

Leopold Ross and Ioanna Gika
MEMBERS OF IO ECHO

The couple are currently writing and recording their second *Io Echo* album, due in 2015. In addition, Ross is composing two films with brother Atticus, who scored *The Social Network* with Trent Reznor. (Liberty Ross—see previous page—is Leo and Atticus’s sister.) **How does L.A. inspire you?** Gika: “It has the most collaborative spirit of any place I’ve lived. There is a willingness to listen as much as to be heard.” Ross: “The music scene is a bit like Darwin’s warm little pond, with lots of splinter scenes. In denser cities only one thing can flourish, but here the geography—the sprawl—allows things to breathe and develop naturally.” **Survival tip:** Ross: “The size of the city can be intimidating at first. It was a bit of a culture shock coming from London. I felt lost. But persevere; it’s worth it.” **Best music venue:** Ross: “The Church on York, for the vibe and energy.” **Local heroes:** Ross: “Charles Bukowski and Dr. Dre.” **Where should every visitor go?** Gika: “The caves in Bronson Canyon, which are haunting and beautiful. It’s where the original *Batman* TV show was shot.”

On Ross, **Theory** jacket (\$425); **Saint Laurent** by **Hedi Slimane** sweatshirt (\$675); **Dolce & Gabbana** pants (\$455); **Saint Laurent** shoes (\$995). On Gika, **Saint Laurent** blouse (\$890), shorts (\$2,390), and bow tie (\$595); vintage kimono from **The Way We Wore** (\$650); **Diesel Black Gold** shoes (\$555).

L.A. PORTFOLIO

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 182] moving to New York they’ve proved that you can thrive as an industry outsider. “From a designer’s point of view there is a bit of a frontier—or perhaps Hollywood—mentality that anyone can do anything,” Moore says of Rodarte and other local fashion stars, such as Scott Sternberg (the designer behind *Band of Outsiders*), Chrome Hearts, and Juan Carlos Obando. “No one cares where you went to school or whom you interned with or assisted. Anything is possible.” In fact, the word *scene*, with its implied restriction, is frowned upon. “There are scenes in New York and London and Paris,” says the British model and designer Liberty Ross. “Here there are individuals.”

Individuals united by a love of that eternal sunshine (yes, even those stylishly pale and tattooed waifs haunting the whiskey bars downtown) and the resulting life lived primarily outdoors. “Designers here are really influenced by the landscape,” Moore says, “whether it’s [jeweler] Irene Neuwirth taking inspiration from the colors of surf and sand outside her home in Venice or the Rodarte sisters building a collection around their childhood memories of the gritty Santa Cruz boardwalk.”

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L.A. fashion is very much not the red carpet, Moore adds. “That’s like playing dress-up. Angelenos see those gowns only on TV, just like the rest of America.” The other unifying theme here is the nearly pathological commitment to comfort—not, says Simon Haas, to being cool (which, of course, makes him the very definition of the word). “It’s cooler to feel comfortable than to be comfortable feeling cool,” is how he defines his sartorial ethos. “Here you can wear whatever you want and feel fine. When I get to New York I feel decidedly understyled, and I appreciate L.A. even more.”

That is something that hasn’t changed. From the upscale T-shirt lines of the ’70s to Juicy Couture in the ’90s, this is the town that, for better and worse, launched fashion’s comfort revolution (a natural extension of the whole idea of lifestyle, which also started here), making it okay for women to wear workout clothes to lunch on Madison Avenue, and for Chanel, etc., to put sneakers on the runway. “Style here is a combination of relaxed and individual,” Moore says, “but also the cheekily rebellious high/low attitude that is part of L.A.’s otherness, of being outside the establishment. And that continues to be a huge influence in fashion, whether it’s Jenna Lyons at J. Crew—she grew up in Southern California—or Hedi Slimane, who designs his Saint Laurent collection here.”

L.A. is, indeed, a peaceable kingdom of the high and low, where fine artists design skateboard decks (John Baldessari for Supreme) and couture designers incorporate *Star Wars* characters into their gowns (Rodarte, 2014). In fact, local reverence for the low might just be the crucial ingredient in L.A.’s secret sauce. Here is the celebrated artist James Turrell (raised in Pasadena) describing his hometown: “One thing about Los Angeles is that it was tasteless, and that is freedom because it has no barriers... It is taste that is actually censorship. L.A. did not have it, and it was a great place because you could do anything in it. That’s why I liked L.A.—the revenge of the tasteless.” ●