

FASHION

Reitmans to unveil fancy frocks by Marie Saint Pierre

Edgy Canadian designer mixes materials with 10 affordable dresses in stores and online Nov. 10

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

In the battle between high fashion and real life that has been the theme of Reitmans commercials in recent years, dresses have often scored zero, losing out to more practical combinations of user-friendly separates.

But Reitmans merchandise manager Brigitte Martin says that's about to change. "Dresses have become comfortable, easier to wear." So it's not all that surprising that the retail chain's first designer collaboration has resulted in a capsule collection consisting solely of frocks.

Landing on Nov. 10, in time for the holiday season, the 10 dresses — which will be available at 34 Reitmans stores in Ontario and Quebec as well as online at reitmans.com — are not conventional cocktail fare. They were designed by Marie Saint Pierre and convention is not her thing: Guts are.

Since establishing her business in Montreal in 1987, Saint Pierre has followed her own path, a course marked by nerve and fortitude. She presented herself to leading Parisian shops with bags of samples on her back. The day after giving birth to her first child (now 15), she was on a plane, off to stage a runway show in New York.

"I was in total pain," remembers Saint Pierre, who says that she wouldn't try anything like that again, though she continues to make bold moves. Last year — without an assist from a big beauty company — she launched two fragrances, named B and C, which are sold in her two Montreal boutiques.

And she continues to express her independent spirit in the clothes she designs, which have won a following among stylish individuals including a couple of governors general (Adrienne Clarkson and Michaëlle Jean) and a slew of figures on Quebec's cultural landscape.

Saint Pierre grew up in an artistic environment. Her father, a radiologist who is also a restaurateur and noted connoisseur of wine, was best friends with painter Jean-Paul Riopelle. Her designs are readily compared to architecture or sculpture, having a three-dimensional quality achieved through drapery, asym-

metry and the layering of planes and textures.

Accessories are similarly crafted. Saint Pierre's signature collection for next spring, which she presented in Toronto last week, features neck ornaments made from strips of leather, inspired by patterns of sand and water left by the tide on El Matador beach in California.

In her signature collection, dresses go from \$650 to \$1,000. The dresses in the Marie Saint Pierre for Reitmans collection will sell for \$85 and \$95.

Though manufactured in Montreal, the line is made from fabrics, such as a stretch polyester jersey, from Asia. The lower price is also made possible by a larger production run. Though Reitmans is not revealing exactly how large that is, Saint Pierre will say that quantities are higher than what she is accustomed to.

Meanwhile, customers get the chance to get used to the touch of a Saint Pierre creation. In the 10 pieces in the Reitmans collection — which includes two styles in petite sizes and two in plus sizes — the designer's writing is evident.

Proclaiming a bold willingness to mix materials, one dress has a tank-style knit bodice, sportily decorated with a zipper, attached to a swirl of organza

The sleeveless matte jersey and organza dress with front zipper detail (\$85) is part of the new Marie Saint Pierre for Reitmans collection.

skirt all ready to compete on the dance floor.

Among other variations of the little black dress, there is a version that is all jersey, with long batwing sleeves with fringed cuffs in a heavier-weight knit that makes them as good as bracelets. Another black jersey model comes with a neckline dripping metal chain, but the chain is attached to a piece of fabric that snaps off. With that — and lipstick touched up in the back of a cab — the sly multitasking number might

leave behind an evening of fun and be ready for a day job.

