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LUSH LUXURY MAGAZINE



STYLE RE-ENERGIZED

GEORGE C IS BRINGING LUXURY DOWN TO EARTH



"Everyone has enough clothes."

You wouldn't expect to hear those words uttered by a boutique owner, especially one who runs a hip, high-end boutique.

But the statement demonstrates where Lisa Corbo, of George C, sees their unique value in a crowded luxury retail market. In her well-traveled, highly experienced mind, she is not selling clothes based on need. It's about desire for something different, for something unique.

George C (21 Hazelton Avenue) sits unassumingly in an elegant white brick townhouse in a tony neighborhood of Canada's largest – and recently voted most stylish – city. Around the corner from the boutique are the five-star Hazelton Hotel and the Four Seasons. Step inside George C and you understand why this might be Toronto's best-kept secret – movers and shakers want to keep it for themselves.

Lisa and George Corbo are no newcomers to retail. George, an elegant man with a gentle demeanor, is a fashion veteran who honed his shoe expertise in Montreal and later with Corbo Boutique on Toronto's Mink Mile. The shop continually received rave reviews for great lines and earned Lisa a reputation for styling customers into then emerging-labels like Ann Demeulemeester and Rick Owens. In 2006, they opened George C with George handling buying for shoes and menswear, while Lisa manages the women's apparel and accessories. Together, their focus on craftsmanship and fashion with personality has created a loyal following.

While most boutiques tuck their shoe offerings in the back or on a lower level, George C's extensive women's selection proudly greets shoppers as they walk through the front door, signaling that ladies shoes continue to be the heart of the operation.

"It's more than half our business," George offers. Its endless classic city boots and bejeweled heels of towering heights are mostly Italian – and, in some cases, exclusive offerings – including Cesare Paciotti, Gianvito Rossi, Le Silla by Enio Silla. In the case of Rocco P., they have a relationship with the designer, meaning their clients have access to custom pieces.

George points out a new line to the store, O Jour by Giorgia Caovilla, the daughter of famed Venetian shoemaker René. The styles are fetching with modest heels no higher than ten centimetres. "She saw a need for great shoes with a lower heel," he says. "They did very well for us."

"Our clients don't want to be branded on the street," Lisa says, explaining that while their customers may shop at Chanel, they aren't interested in wearing luxury labels head-to-toe. "They're looking for sophistication over brands."

And they don't want to look like their daughters. This is a grown-up store."

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George C's well-edited inventory speaks to those who are comfortable with their style and demand high quality. Roughly 80 percent of the labels for women are exclusive to Toronto.

While some may be considered smaller labels, their caché is no less powerful in the world of ready-to-wear: head-turning dresses by Giles Francesco Scognamiglio; crisp white shirts and brushed woolen jackets by Mauro Grifoni; leather and fur jackets by DromE; an exquisite coat by Philip Lim; embellished blouses by Yigal Azourel and jersey dresses by Kimberly Ovitz.

Can't decide? Lisa and her staff are experts at pulling all the right pieces together. "I even go to my clients' homes and help them adapt a new season to their closet," she says.

The George C menswear collection, albeit smaller, has excelled with Costume National suiting. But in recent years that category is evolving and George finds most of their male clients are moving towards "semi-casual wear" – hence the cashmere sweaters by 5 + 1 Annapurna, leather by DROME and relaxed jackets by Barena.

George C as a boutique isn't trend-driven, though it does offer trendy luxury at good points. But really, it all comes back to personal style.

As Lisa points out, "People remember you for how you look. It's not about what you put on – it's about how you put it together."

By Leesa Butler, www.flist.ca