

# WONDER BOYS

Meet Ruffian:  
fashion's new  
dream team



Cotton belted dress, approximately \$3,625, Ruffian. Bracelets, Holt Renfrew Private Brand; hose, Mondor; shoes, Giuseppe Zanotti.

**"A RUFFIAN IS ONE** who goes against the grain," says designer Brian Wolk (above right), explaining the meaning behind the timeless label he codesigns with Claude Morais. Since debuting their first prêt-à-porter collection in 2004, the tag team behind Ruffian has created a devout following among the fashion set and become one of the most-talked-about entities in the crowded women's wear arena. Glamour girls such as Kirsten Dunst and China Chow are smitten with their designs and, last year, in an unprecedented tie with newcomer 3.1 Phillip Lim, Ruffian picked up Fashion Group International's Rising Star Award. While previous seasons' designs have been available at Barneys New York and Saks Fifth Avenue in the U.S., Harvey Nichols in London and Takashimaya in Japan, Ruffian's collection now graces the racks at Holt Renfrew.

Hard to believe the luxury label almost never happened. Montreal-born Morais started his fashion career as a model and stylist. Wolk, who grew up in Westchester, N.Y., is a schooled fashion and costume designer who worked at Chanel, designing haute couture accessories. The pair met in 2001 at a reading of Marcel Proust in New York—fitting, since their designs are as timeless and nuanced as the literature they're attracted to—and parlayed their mutual interest and couture training into reinterpreting American sportswear. "Both of us were interested in the fine arts," says Wolk, "but fashion seemed like the most prolific way to send a global message."

Morais and Wolk specialize in creating aesthetically refined pieces that are beautifully wearable. "Our woman is smart, witty, sexy and affords herself the privilege of luxury," says Wolk. Each partner brings a different sensibility to their collaboration—Morais in his exploration of colour; Wolk utilizing his experience in construction—and it is that collaboration they value most.

Aligning themselves with the designs and forms of other artists, Morais and Wolk have ensured Ruffian's spring collection remains true to those values. Their colour palette is mostly black-and-white, punctuated with bold primary colours (think Roy Lichtenstein). The duo drew further inspiration from Frank Lloyd Wright ("The ultimate American modernist," says Morais) and Frank Gehry's architectural rigour to create voluminous silhouettes. Standouts include a fitted high-neck trench, sleek high-waisted trousers paired with transparent cotton-organdy blouses, embroidered shifts that delicately hug the body and, of course, their signature ruffled dresses.

Their '90s-inspired clean minimalism offers a thoroughly modern brand of femininity, but Ruffian aims to deliver beyond individual pieces. Morais and Wolk design with a much larger picture in mind. "Fashion for us is simply not one's clothes," goes their philosophy. "It is the mood one inspires, the conversation one stimulates and the style an individual creates when they present themselves." —Aya McMillan

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