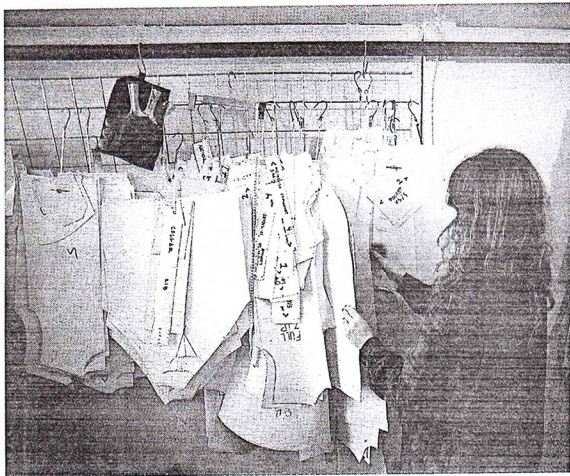


Muttonhead

Local fashion design and production on Sterling Road is a nod to the neighbourhood's manufacturing past. BY ERIN PEHLIVAN



The manufacturing glory days are nearly over for the former industrial lands along Sterling Road near Bloor and Lansdowne. While the Nestlé factory still cranks out tasty treats, many of the buildings—at least the ones that aren't prime for levelling—are home to artist's lofts and quirky sports leagues. As gentrification looms, Sterling Road's residents must endure the construction of new townhouses alongside the debris from demolition.

Between the rusted fences surrounding fields of nothing but overgrown grass, and the sight of a failed business with "MUERTE" spray-painted on its façade, Sterling Road feels like an untamed country. It's the sort of place where you can get away with an illegal bonfire or an after-hours party. Or even a successful independent fashion line.

At Muttonhead, a made-in-Toronto premium unisex brand, founder Meg Sinclair and her sister Mel and Paige Cowan, create on-trend, classically utilitarian garments. Currently available in 50 stores around the world ("The buyers come to us now," says Sinclair), Muttonhead uses new materials from overseas and custom fabrics, as well as sustainable fabrics such as recycled hemp—plus reclaimed leather from Value Village for some of the details in their more expensive pieces—to create boyishly cut clothing.

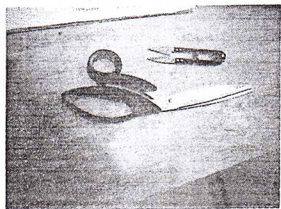
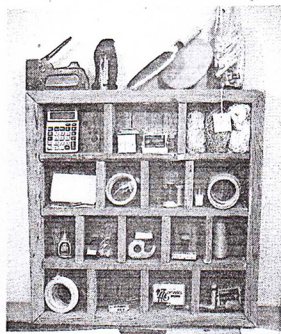
From their spacious workplace inside the sprawling complex at 163 Sterling Road, Sinclair controls the sewing and manufacturing process via three Toronto factories in Chinatown and Scarborough (and one in Manitoba). The ability to visit garment workers on site is important to Sinclair, since it allows her to ensure both quality and fair labour practices. She makes frequent trips to the factories now, but says at first it wasn't easy finding manufacturers that met her standards. "I literally must have gone to 50 different properties," she says. "The [factories] we work with now actually care about making your product better."

Because of strict federal laws on raw-material imports into Canada,

Sterling Road's industrial devolution

Some of the street's former manufacturers.

- › Standard Chemical (13 Sterling)
- › T.A. Lytle Co., makers of pickles, jams, and Canada Brand ketchup (128-136 Sterling)
- › Tower Automotive, which was formerly Aluminum Co. of Canada Ltd. (158 Sterling)
- › E & J Silk Co., maker of ribbons and silks (100 Sterling)
- › Canadian Laundry Machinery Co. Ltd., makers of Canadian laundry machinery (47-93 Sterling)
- › Harris Lithographing Co. Ltd. (113-125 Sterling)



duties on textiles have become so expensive that it's cheaper to outsource work to overseas manufacturers. But according to the Canadian Apparel Federation, some Canadian companies are reconsidering domestic production if gas and transportation prices continue to rise abroad.

This is good news for Sinclair. Since she created Muttonhead as her design thesis collection when she graduated from Ryerson almost three years ago, local production has been her focus. "I'm finding that people care more where it's made rather than [if] it's made from organic cotton," she says.

Sinclair isn't the only one who believes in supporting her neighbours. While Muttonhead isn't exactly spearheading an industrial revolution on Sterling Road, it's part of a bigger movement of community-based clothing designers using locally sourced materials. Other designers in this group include 18 Waits, Miik, Clothing Brand Experiment, Jerico, and Kali Clothing, just to name a few.

If domestic manufacturing is making a comeback, then Sterling Road might be the blank slate young entrepreneurs are looking for. Savvy start-ups can set up shop next to theatres and galleries in an area where factories once flourished.

Gentrification is not new to Toronto, nor is local manufacturing. But the made-in-Canada movement is picking up steam. And even as Sterling's iconic Tower Automotive chimney was finally demolished in 2010, a new future in production had appeared on the neighbourhood's horizon.

