

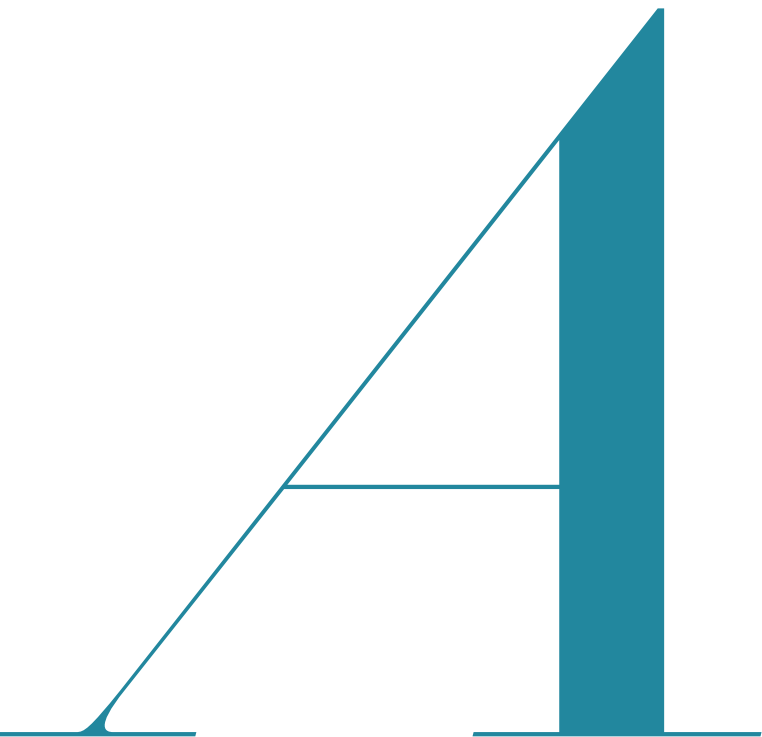
GARIBOLDI STATEMENT

FROM ITS EMBROIDERED FLOWERS AND IMPRESSIONIST PRINTS TO RUCHING AND CORSET SILHOUETTES, CIAO SEA'S LATEST COLLECTION WILL LEAVE YOU LONGING FOR A BYGONE ERA

by ANDREA KARR







WOMAN SITS IN A LUSH CONSERVATORY surrounded by greenery, her hands clasped before her and her gaze softened toward the artist. Titled *Madame Cézanne in the Conservatory*, the artwork is a dreamy depiction of real-life muse Hortense Fiquet, wife to French post-impressionist painter Paul Cézanne, a man who crafted over two dozen of her likenesses in the late nineteenth century. The portrait now hangs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, but its effects are far reaching, for it acted as a springboard for the third and most recent Ciao Sea resort-wear collection, *Le Jardin de Madame Cézanne*.

“The collection is inspired by the impressionists [and post-impressionists] who were so good at painting mood,” says Ciao Sea’s founder Chelsea Chen (Ciao Sea/Chelsea, get it?), who unveiled the brand in summer 2018. Chen first saw the portrait five years ago and it had such an impact that she and her team of designers conceived a range of swimsuits, cover-ups, skirts and tops overflowing with turn-of-the-century nods. Hyper-feminine in aesthetic, the collection includes pieces such as a black mesh robe with corset detailing and floral embroidery, a

swimsuit with sweetheart bustier and white lacing up one side and an intricate long-sleeved lace halter with cold-shoulder cutouts.

Chen’s favourite item, the strapless bird-print body suit, is a pastel creation with painted florals splashed across a simple silhouette. The wow factor comes in the form of reflected fish that transform into birds along the torso of the suit. “The colour matching was a difficult task,” Chen says, but the final product was worth the effort and creates an effect similar to paint on the body. Plus, it seamlessly integrates the Asian motifs of Ciao Sea’s first collection, *Femme Dynasty*, into the European garden look of the most recent designs.

Chen, who was born in China and moved to Canada when she was 16, travelled frequently as a child and became fascinated with culture, art and style from a young age. When assembling a vision board for *Femme Dynasty*, her debut collection, she looked to Chinese artwork and



“I WANTED TO CREATE GARMENTS THAT COULD EASILY TRANSITION FROM TIME BY THE POOL TO DINNER.”



garments – ultimately choosing to incorporate Chinese button knots typically found on cheongsams, koi fish and lotus flower prints, Chinese characters and kimono-style robes. Still available through ciao sea.com, the pieces offer a nod to Chen’s heritage and introduced the world to the theatricality of her luxe label.

This cosmopolitan approach was central to the brand from day one. When Chen launched Ciao Sea in Toronto last year, she wanted to produce a line-up of clothing that provoked the feeling of “adventure and the excitement that comes with travelling,” she says. “Whenever I travel, the different kinds of cultural history that I encounter bring me inspiration for my collections. I hope that by wearing my pieces, women can feel transported to a different time and place.” Whether that be a garden in Aix-en-Provence or a stretch of sand on an island off China’s coast.

In addition to Chen’s interest in infusing “modern design into classic styles” and “empowering wearers to take daring adventures through different cultures and eras,” Chen had a few other goals in mind. “My friends and I couldn’t find a brand that was suitable for different occasions,” she says. “I wanted to create garments that could easily transition from time by the pool to dinner.” As a result, many of the line’s beach cover-ups would look at home at a dinner party, while the swimsuits need only the addition of a skirt to move from pool lounge to cocktail bar.

Chen also wanted every piece in her collections to have a level of detail not commonly seen in swimwear and resort attire. “The production facilities always tell us that we put in too much detail, which drives the cost up,” she says. “Obviously balancing quality with cost is very important, but I always work hard to keep all of those details in place.”

ABOVE The strapless bird print bodysuit is one of Chen’s favourite pieces in the collection.

OPPOSITE PAGE Ciao Sea founder Chelsea Chen.



It's that attention to each element of creation and production that sets Ciao Sea apart, as well as its unique placement as a luxury resort-wear line in Canada – a country better known for its outerwear and leather goods than swimwear. “Globally, Canada gives off this feeling that it's cold and icy,” Chen says. “But I want to send the message that it also has a hot, summery side.” And just because many Canadians live far from the ocean, doesn't mean they can't enjoy the pleasures of elevated resort wear like the rest of the world. “Our collections don't have to be worn at the beach or pool,” she says. “The lake is also a great setting.” In other words, whether you're jet-setting to French Polynesia, sipping drinks next to a rooftop pool in Los Angeles or reading a book on your dock in Muskoka, it's always a good time to journey afar through fashion.

Though Ciao Sea is still in its infancy, Chen hopes to eventually broaden its scope to include menswear, kids clothing and resort-related products like hats and slippers. “I want Ciao Sea to become everybody's go-to vacation wear for any destination close to a body of water,” she says. And more global inspiration is surely in the pipeline. For now, a delicate piece from Le Jardin de Madame Cézanne can transport its female wearers to a sunny garden in nineteenth century France – and impart the frisson of romance – no matter where they actually spend their summers. ■



Accessorize **THIS**

ENHANCE YOUR SUMMER
BOARDWALK-TO-PATIO WARDROBE
WITH THESE SLEEK FINDS FROM THREE
BELOVED TORONTO BRANDS



MIDAS TOUCH

Awarded CAFA's Accessory Designer of the Year in 2017, Jenny Bird has been making bold, contemporary jewellery – think mixed metal rings, geometric earrings and architectural cuffs – for more than a decade. Her pieces have been worn by the likes of Bella Hadid and Priyanka Chopra and are favoured for their cool-girl simplicity. Try the golden draped chain statement cuff with your bather for poolside-lounging perfection. *Jenny Bird 'Chloe' cuff, \$150, jenny-bird.ca.*



LASER VISON

Elegance, thy name is Zvelle. Need sandals to complete your summer wardrobe? Turn to Elle Ayoubzadeh's lovingly designed footwear line. Each pair of shoes is handcrafted by Italian artisans and many feature a laser-cut heart pattern inspired by the Persian symbol for five, which Ayoubzadeh uses to represent the five influential cities (from Shiraz, Iran to Sydney, Australia) that she's called home. *Zvelle 'Monir' heels, \$405, zvelle.com.*



BELT WAY

Opelle, a line of leather handbags designed by Amy Malcolm and Beth Nicholson, is handcrafted in small batches in Toronto. Though the label often creates soft, slouchy silhouettes, the mix of permanent and seasonal collections allows for trendy new additions – like this python-printed suede convertible bag that can be belted around the waist, worn slung across the body or hung over the shoulder. *Opelle 'mISSA' convertible belt bag, \$350, opellecanada.com.*

