

Sew What?

Bryce Black prepares for liftoff post *Project Runway*

BY ERIN ROOK

Gay Portlander Bryce Black may not have won the ninth season of Lifetime's *Project Runway*, but the 26-year-old Lady Gaga-obsessed designer represented the city and the community, returning with a bit of refinement—and a stronger sense of self.

"There's nothing in the world like *Project Runway*," says Black, who left the show on the eighth episode, which aired September 15. "It's not like the real world. It's such a strange little bubble that you're put in, and you're cut off from your personal life back home and you're forced in with these complete strangers to have relationships, but they all kind of want you to go home. It's a weird environment."

Still, that environment encouraged Black to hone a competitive mentality and engage in some productive self-reflection.

"It really forces you to look at who you are as a designer," Black says. "[I still have] the same kind of voice and edge that I had before, it's just [that] the sophistication level seems to be better."

Before auditioning for *Project Runway*, Black studied apparel design at The Art Institute of Portland and interned with local design house StudioSKB. Though he had entered the competition confident in his abilities—saying he would win because "I can design anything"—he ultimately succumbed to a nagging inner voice.

"I think the main reason I was booted off the show was because I doubted myself so much and I was always second-guessing myself," Black says. "More than anything, design-wise, I've learned that you need to stick to what you do and be true to you. I faltered too much ... and I went back and forth too much. I think doubt got the best of me."

This struggle came to a head during Black's final challenge, in which he was tasked with designing a dress for a non-model client (aka the "real woman" challenge).

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-BRYCE BLACK

"In that episode that I get kicked off, I scrap the dress that I had been making the first day and started over and made a new one—just because I was doubting that that was the right one—and in the end produced a dress that was not fitted well and looked a mess because I didn't have the time," Black says.

Had he stuck to his guns, Black says he would have done more with denim—his fabric of choice—and drawn from his tried-and-true sources of inspiration.

Black says he owes his designs to quirky, iconic figures like Lady Gaga and David Bowie. One such piece, which Black calls simply "The Dress," takes cues from Ziggy Stardust with its asymmetrical bodice and feathered skirt.

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But don't expect to see Black rocking a cape or mask—his personal style is far more subdued. Judge Michael Kors may have called the designer's look "preppy" (Black respectfully disagrees), but Black's cardigans and scarves fit well with Portland's largely laid-back fashion sense.



he acknowledges that the city has more than its share of so-bad-it's-almost-good fashion, in general he'd like to see people take more risks and step out of their (literal) comfort zones.

"One thing I love about Portland is that, unlike anywhere else I've ever been, we go crazy. There's so much 'bad fashion'—I call it [that] because it's so overdone it's almost costume—but I really appreciate it, because you can always look at things for inspiration, like what people are wearing on the street here, and edit it down," Black says.

Unfortunately, the "casual mentality" of the Pacific Northwest has many people editing their looks too far down. Black's most despised fashion *faux pas* is a prime example.

"I'm so sick of seeing girls in Ugg boots and leggings, I could just scream," he says.

Luckily for Portland, Black is prepared to swoop in like his superhero muses to save the anti-fashionistas from themselves.

He is showing an avant-garde piece during Portland Fashion Week (Oct. 5-9) as a preview to the winter term course in experimental design he'll be teaching at Portland Sewing. Black says those are his primary commitments for now, but that plans for his own designs or another line with StudioSKB are in the works.

Whatever Black decides to do next, he will benefit from all that *Runway* exposure.

"The best part about doing the *Project Runway* competition was just getting my work out there and my name," Black says. "It's pretty amazing because I just graduated and I just showed in New York Fashion Week." ☐

To see Black's current designs, visit projectrunway.com and studioskb.com. For more on Portland Fashion Week, visit portlandfashionweek.net. To see Portland Sewing's class schedule, visit portlandsewing.com.

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