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TV

Style guides

Canadians Joe Zee and Brad Goreski avoid the faux fierceness that pervades fashion reality TV

EVER SINCE *America's Next Top Model* hit the ratings jackpot in 2003, networks have been investing in fashion-focused reality TV. This fall, 20 new style-centric reality shows appeared on the small screen alone, and production has begun on another dozen slated for 2012.

The result is a new star system that includes models, stylists, magazine editors and countless other behind-the-seams scenesters. Many are plucked from fashion magazines, mens- and womenswear boutiques, design studios, even hair and beauty salons.

Canada's contribution are two of the most blogged, watched, tweeted and talked-about stylists, Joe Zee and Brad Goreski. Both men—who hail from Ontario—have their own reality TV series, minus the typical *Devil Wears Prada* moments currently plaguing shows such as *Project Runway* and *America's Next Top Model*. In the cutthroat world of on-camera fashion, Zee and Goreski's approachable style stands in stark contrast to the faux fierceness associated with tastemakers and clothing creators.

"The odds were completely against me," says Zee, 42, taking in the view from his spacious Sixth Avenue office in New York. "I had such a disadvantage because I was not a blond, white woman," he says of his early days. "On

top of all that, I wasn't American... and had the Canadian too-nice stigma. But cracking this industry was something I was so driven to do. I knew I'd turn those odds around at any cost. I even worked for free for two years just to get into the business."

Now Zee, who has been the creative director of *Elle* magazine since 2007, is producing and hosting *All on the Line* for the U.S.-based Sundance Channel.

"TV taught me so much about fashion. I watched it about nine hours a day when I was growing up as a kid in Toronto, so it seems natural for me to have my own show now," Zee says. "It started when I saw *Dynasty's* over-the-top glamour. I was hooked. Seeing how clothes could become a person's character had impact. The emotional factor behind all those wardrobe choices was really powerful. Every single scene on that show seemed like its own epic red-carpet moment."

Fuelled by fantasies of dressing Alexis and Krystle Carrington, Zee moved to New York at 21 to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology, quickly realizing the stakes were as high as Joan Collins's cauliflower-shaped hairdo.

His persistence paid off and ultimately landed him a job as assistant to *Allure* magazine's creative director Polly Mellen in 1992, where he lugged around clothes and helped put together outfits for photo shoots. "She trained my eye and taught me about taste," he says, adding that her vision helped when he moved on to work as stylist for *Vanity*



Sales job: Joe Zee with designer Kara Janx on the Sundance Channel's *All on the Line*

Fashion stars: Between them, Brad Goreski (left) and Joe Zee have dressed Madonna, Jennifer Aniston, Cameron Diaz and Demi Moore

Fair and Details and then as fashion director at *W* magazine. "Because of her, I know the difference between great clothes and well-made clothes."

All on the *Line*, now in its second season, he is proud to say, strays from "pitting designers against one another, since there's already enough of that on TV." According to *Women's Wear Daily*, two more shows with a *Project Runway*-esque contest premise will be landing in the new year: *24 Hour Catwalk*, hosted by model Alexa Chung, and *Fashion Star* with Elle Macpherson.

Zee's thinking is fashion should be for the masses, not just the wealthy and celebrities. "The Berlin Wall of fashion fell ages ago," he says of the days when the only way the public could find out about runway collections was from the fashion magazines. Now designers stream their shows online and bloggers tweet every detail. "The biggest hammer to that wall was technology and television—both things made fashion much more democratic."

Where *Top Model*'s Tyra Banks and *Project Runway*'s Heidi Klum act as judge and juror and arbiters of taste, Zee is more like a guidance counsellor. Rather than tearing down talent, he doles out market-savvy advice to up-and-coming designers as well as established names desperate to get their collections to stand out in a sea of labels.

"I didn't invent the idea of having a business or selling clothing to stores," says Zee, responding to criticism that design is an art and the show focuses too much on sales. "If someone doesn't want to sell their pieces, then they shouldn't call themselves a designer," he says. "They should just become artists and be done with it."

As Zee was working his way up the ladder, another future fashion star was back home glued to *Fashion Television*. Brad Goreski, 33, remembers "religiously and obsessively" watching host Jeanne Beker report from the runways of Paris, Milan, New York and London from his hometown of Port Perry. "Jeanne taught me which designers were drawing from art history and who was who in that world—it was an education," he says. After finishing his art history degree at the University of Southern California, he moved to New York for

internships at *Vogue* and *W* magazines.

"I didn't have the same access when I was a kid as many people do now. All I had was *FT* and then I waited for the magazines to come out once a month. There was no instant anything, no Internet, no blogs. That's why I think reality TV shows about fashion can only be a good thing. Access should make people more creative. I so wanted to be where Jeanne was and now I am."

Goreski's career mirrors Zee's in a number of ways. Both have dressed some of the biggest names in Hollywood (Zee has styled

traditional breakdowns. He worked his way up in Zoe's company and began to dress her A-list clientele of Hollywood actresses.

Goreski's own preppy wardrobe and striking red-carpet choices—along with his drag queen-inspired vocab (the most popular catchphrase being "werking a lewk")—made him a breakout star on *The Rachel Zoe Project*, where he stayed for three seasons before opening his own styling business.

He credits his parents and grandparents for his success, in no small part because they "never told me the way I dressed was wrong. Whether or not I am the flamboyant stereotype of what gay means, I don't really care. I slip on a dress and a pair of heels every so often, I wear glittery shoes or hot pink suits. Clothing is there for us to have fun and express ourselves with and sometimes people lose that joy."

It's *A Brad, Brad World* chronicles his work as a contributor for *InStyle* magazine, his long-term romantic relationship with TV producer Gary Janetti (*Family Guy*, *Will & Grace*) and the thrill of working with his own celebrity clients, such as Jessica Alba.

"Part of the reason I thought I needed to do this is to show people that I'm more than just a personality. I'm someone who has vision. I'm not just an assistant who's constantly looking for FedEx boxes," he says, alluding to his salad days on *The Rachel Zoe Project*. "I want people to know who I am and where I came from."

Goreski's early days in Port Perry—which he plans to talk about in an upcoming memoir with HarperCollins called *Born to Be Brad: My Life and Style, So Far*—weren't quite as fabulous. "I

was this very strange kid out there, doing things like walking around dressed up as Madonna in third grade on Halloween. People would laugh at me. I got bullied. Growing up gay, I had so many people say things that hurt me but I built up a resistance. I used fashion as my armour in some ways and it saved my life, daily."

Eventually he wants to take the *Brad World* cameras to the small town around 80 km northeast of Toronto, where his family still lives. He'll show viewers the main street where he wore his outrageous outfits.

"Looking back, I was so brave and courageous." **ELIO IANNACCI**

'People would laugh at me. I used fashion as my armour in some ways and it saved my life, daily.'



Front and centre: Brad Goreski next to actress Eva Amurri, ready to tweet from New York fashion week's Lela Rose spring-summer show

Madonna, Jennifer Aniston and Mary J. Blige, while Goreski has dressed Cameron Diaz and Demi Moore), and each worked their way up from intern to stylist to TV host. Goreski also works frequently in New York, where he has just finished filming his new reality TV show, *It's a Brad, Brad World*, which is scheduled to make its debut on Bravo TV in the U.S. on Jan. 2.

Goreski was working in L.A. as *Vogue*'s West Coast assistant when he was hired by Rachel Zoe. As assistant to the famed L.A. stylist, a camera crew filmed his every move—and tear—as season one of *The Rachel Zoe Project* show captured his trademark emo-