



## The COS effect

This fall's most anticipated retailer arrival is the opening of COS in Toronto and Montreal.

**Andrew Sardone** travels to London to meet the Swede behind the label's men's wear offering, who's charged with ensuring its high-street collection has high design cred

**O**n a cool London evening in early July, the Serpentine Galleries's summer pavilion glowed lemon yellow and acid green during a party hosted by the fashion brand COS. Every June, a new guest artist is invited to construct an open-air space on the site – in previous years, the structure has resembled a pebble-shaped spaceship or luminescent scaffolding climbing toward the sky. The 2015 edition was conceived by Madrid-based architects Jose Selgas and Lucia Cano (a.k.a. SelgasCano) and featured a warren of rooms sheathed in a translucent rainbow-coloured skin.

The occasion of the COS bash was the launch of an annual event series spotlighting artists, poets, dancers and filmmakers called Park Nights. As part of this year's sponsorship, the Soho-based label created a limited-edition unisex backpack and retailed it online to benefit the Serpentine Trust. Not long after Lion Babe lead singer Jillian Hervey and her mane of blonde hair had lured the party's crowd of fashionable Londoners into the drizzle for a riotous outdoor set, it had already sold out.

Taking in the scene was Martin Andersson, COS's head of men's-wear design who, along with women's-wear-lead Karin Gustafsson, is charged with infusing the label with the creative energy that filled the Serpentine's lawn that evening. That COS vibe – minimal but approachable, utilitarian but sleek, and predominantly neutral but not afraid of a shock of colour or novel texture – is well-known to style-savvy Canadian men who search out the affordable collection abroad. Now, with the autumn launch of locations in Toronto and Montreal, that in-the-know audience is poised to grow in Canada.

For the uninitiated, COS stands for "collection of style" and is pronounced "cause" by Andersson and his colleagues at the brand's headquarters off Oxford Street. Founded in 2007 as a more refined offshoot of H&M with pricing that starts where its parent brand's peak (a blazer will run you about \$350), it has expanded to 127 stores stocking a merchandise mix that's 20-percent men's wear. What sets the label apart from its high-street competition is a product development process that operates more like a designer brand than a mass-market retailer.

"The way we build and research collections is not by following trends," says Andersson the morning after the Serpentine shindig. He's sitting in the fourth-floor press showroom in front of the fall

collection and spare inspiration boards pinned with photos of performance artist Marina Abramovic and examples of the obscure Japanese art movement Mono-ha. "We research art and design, and what's important for us is to stick to what COS is as a brand. I think it's quite unique on the high street that we do that."

What COS is as a men's-wear brand is, in many ways, a culmination of Andersson's own experience as a designer before he joined the company in 2008. Born in Sweden and schooled in men's-wear design at Central St. Martin's, he developed his respect for tradition during stints at U.K. heritage labels Hackett London and Aquascutum. "I love the craftsmanship of classic tailoring and I love the attention to detail," he says. "How to do the classics is super important because, for us to do a modern product, move forward and propose something inventive, you have to know the past."

Andersson's sense of modernity can be traced to the four years he spent running his own eponymous label and his Swedish roots. "Growing up in Sweden, its drilled into you that design should have a purpose and a function," he says, describing a reductionist approach to creating clothing that emphasizes simplification. "We feel that by taking things away, the garment becomes just a little bit more timeless because it can exist in any era." It won't be surprising that Andersson's favourite quote is the proclamation often credited to German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: "God is in the details."

For fall, that functional philosophy expresses itself through a trio of staples. First, there's the white shirt, which COS interprets in a variety of ways, including a classic Oxford minus any top-stitching, with buttons hidden behind a crisp placket. Second, is a blazer that owes its deconstructed look to a softer shoulder shape and a slub-wool fabrication inspired by kimonos textiles. Finally, there's a tailored coat in wool-cashmere melton with side-seam pockets, no front darts and a signature relaxed silhouette.

"The difference between a modern garment and a fairly average garment is proportion," says Andersson. "The proportion is just a little bit different, so that when you see someone walking down the street out of the corner of your eye, you can tell it's COS." ■

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COS men's-wear designer Martin Andersson (top) translates the label's signature minimalism to fall's lineup of tailored coats, shirts and suits (above).



Flip through COS's fall men's wear look book by downloading the free Globe Style Advisor app at [tgam.ca/styleadvisor](http://tgam.ca/styleadvisor).