

# THE QUEEN OF NAUGHTY AND NICE

London's Agent Provocateur is known for making beautiful lingerie in a diverse range of styles and sizes. In the lead up to the opening of its first Canadian location, the company's creative director, Sarah Shotton, spoke to **Odessa Paloma Parker** about designing intimate apparel for all types of women, including Rihanna

A favourite of stars like Rihanna and Gwen Stefani, London-based lingerie company Agent Provocateur has built its reputation on pretty, playful pieces. Later this month, the brand will open its first Canadian boutique in Toronto, where it will offer Agent Provocateur's signature items as well as swimwear, a bridal line and a limited-edition couture collection called Soirée. The woman behind all those lacy numbers is creative director Sarah Shotton, a farmer's daughter who wears wellington boots and a ponytail in her downtime. Shotton has been with the company since it launched in 1994, first as an apprentice in its Soho shop in London. The insights she picked up while working with clients as well as during her own search for beautiful lingerie suitable for larger cup sizes lead Shotton to expand the label's sizing range. Shotton spoke to *Globe Style* from the company's headquarters.

**Agent Provocateur is known for inclusiveness and catering to everyone. Can you talk about that?**

I design for the different moods of people, whether you're feeling girly or want something that's more everyday and subdued. There's something for everybody. You can come in and be a first-time shopper at Agent Provocateur and there will be something for you that will make you feel comfortable and not intimidated. It's kind of addictive

— once you start, you want more and more [pieces] and before you know it, you're going for things that are quite skimpy, which is brilliant. What's really great about Agent Provocateur is that it's a real confidence booster — it makes women feel good.

**What do you have to consider when you're designing?**

The main questions that I always keep in mind are "How is this going to look on other women?" and "How is this going to make somebody feel?" And so I design things that I really, really love and that I would wear myself — that's really important. It's great because upstairs in the design room, where the technicians are, there are a lot of women. It's great because the age range goes from about 18 to 70 and everyone tries everything on. There are a lot of women in the whole building, so we're fitting on all different shapes and sizes. We're just constantly fitting things to make sure it works for everybody. It's quite funny.

**So your team is in the building with you. How much solitude do you require to get in the "design zone"?**

I have to have lots of books around me. I have my own room and I have to have music on. I listen to lots of different things and have all my fabrics around me. I kind of get pissed off when people keep walking backward and forward into the room, saying, "Oh, Sarah ..." And I'm like, "Oh my god, I've forgot-

ten what I was going to draw!" I used to quite like being in the middle of nowhere — I would go to my parents' farm and lock myself in a room, but now I'm designing all the time. The collections are so massive — it doesn't really stop.

**How much do you look to ready-to-wear fashion to inform your designs?**

A little bit — I go through phases. We don't have prediction people. I don't work with anything like that, it's more of a gut feeling. For this autumn/winter we're going very seventies, which I think is what everyone's doing. I tend to look at the couture shows more than anything — I just find them so inspirational.

**The notion of "naughty" comes up quite a bit in the brand's product descriptions. What do you consider naughty?**

Well, it depends what phase I'm going through. It takes a lot to shock me. I've seen a lot in my time at Agent Provocateur. When I think of naughty, I think of mischief and being up to no good. And I think Agent Provocateur is naughty — there are definitely ranges that are very naughty — but it's also playful. I always think of someone who doesn't look naughty but they are. And I think it's a good thing to be described as naughty — it's actually really nice.

This interview has been condensed and edited.



**UNDERCOVER AGENT** Sarah Shotton (top) is the design force behind Agent Provocateur's popular lingerie, which will be sold at its new Toronto store along with swimwear, a bridal line and a limited-edition couture collection.