

Addresses for Dresses

Written by Monique Polak

I blame Oma – the Dutch word for grandmother – for my dress habit.

In my memory, Oma is always wearing a dress. Usually, navy blue with a flower or geometric print. And always with her gold brooch pinned just over her heart.

I also blame Montreal. This city is home to so many fashion designers. Their products – including dresses – can be found in shops all over town.

Dresses are easy. No need to look for a matching top (or a bottom). In cold weather, I slip a dress on over a pair of tights and I'm good to go. In summer, all I need is a dress and Birkenstocks. For me, every season calls for a new dress. Even during a pandemic.

As a young woman, I shopped at Quelles Sensations, a clothing shop on Sherbrooke Street in NDG. I'm afraid I dropped a good chunk of my disposable income there. But when Quelles Sensations closed, I had to venture out to find some new dress destinations.

It was the store window at Katrin Leblond Design that caught my eye – and which still does whenever I walk, bike or drive along St. Laurent Boulevard, just north of Mount Royal Avenue. Katrin's window is always bursting with colour. The clothes she designs have a whimsical quality. One of my all-time favourite dresses comes from her shop. It's a simple black dress, but the black and white whale appliqué on the skirt makes it special – and makes me happy every time I wear it.

If I'm with my daughter Ali, we stop for lunch at Aux Vivres, a vegan restaurant a few doors down. I always order the dragon bowl, and a drink called Tonic, made with apple and ginger. I consumed many dragon bowls and Tonics before I learned that one of the owners of Aux Vivres just happens to be married to Katrin Leblond.

More recently, on a walk with my fashionista friend Sabine, we discovered a tiny clothing shop called Slak. It's on Villera Street in Park Extension, a fifteen-minute walk north from the Jean Talon Market.

The store – part shop, part atelier -- is owned by Mélanie Duhaime and Joanne Runeckles. The pair designs and creates most of what's for sale in their shop. Their style is chic streetwear. The name Slak, a play on the word "slack" or loose-fitting, is a wink to Mélanie's roots in skateboard-snowboard fashion.

From Slak, it's a short walk down the street to Café Vito. Go there for your caffeine fix – but also to people watch. In warm weather, the terrace is full. And even on the coldest days, you'll usually find someone outside, sipping coffee – and watching the world go by.

When I'm trying on a dress, I often hear my oma's voice. She usually says the same thing: "Buy it!" I heard her voice this week when I was at Slak. I'd gone to pick up a dress I'd tried on before the last lockdown. It was a touch big and Joanne was going to alter it for me. But Joanne wasn't there, and neither was my dress, which she'd brought home to work on. So instead I chatted with Mélanie and had a look at what else was in the shop.

On a small rack by the window, I found a row of aprons, made from recycled fabrics by another local designer, Marie-France Desrosiers. Kind of like a dress, but not quite. Anyway, I tried one on – just for fun.

Oma told me to buy it.

Of course I wear it in the kitchen while I'm cooking or doing the dishes. But I'm wearing it now too as I write this little story. I guess you could call it pandemicwear. And I've pinned Oma's gold brooch just over my heart.

Katrin Leblond Design

4641 St. Laurent Blvd.

<https://store.katrinleblond.com/>

Aux Vivres

4631 St. Laurent Blvd.

<https://www.auxvivres.com/>

Slak

352 Villeray St.

<http://www.slak.ca/>

Café Vito

151 Villeray St.

<https://cafevito.ca/>

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