



IN GOOD TASTE

FASHION DESIGNER AND
VOLTAGE SUPERSTAR
frances zerr ON THE ART
OF LOOKING EFFORTLESS.

A Mary O'Regan

Watch enough episodes of *Project Runway* and you'll soon discover that a fashion designer's taste level is just as important as his or her sewing ability. A keen eye for trends—not just what's hip now, but what's going to be hip next season—is a big part of what sets local designer Frances Zerr above the crowd. As this year's most buzzed-about Voltage designer, she's ready to put her tastes to the test with a fashion-forward, workwear-meets-activewear spring collection.

"All my friends are like, 'You're going to make a long skirt?'" she laughs. "And I'm like, 'I swear, in Berlin this summer they were everywhere.' And they're just like, 'You're crazy.'"

At 25 years old, with a resume that includes a degree from Parsons The New School for Design; an internship at Unis in New York City; product development at Chamilia, a Minneapolis-based charm bracelet company with global distribution; and freelance work with a handbag and glove company in Berlin, Zerr is far from crazy. (Not to mention smart—long skirts are definitely in this season.) The Fargo native creates simple, clean designs for women who want to look fashionable without trying too hard.

"The ultimate goal is to get up in the morning and look effortlessly cool," Zerr explains. Her customers also have the bonus of wearing 100-percent sustainable materials, such as organic cottons, soy and hemp products.

Zerr, who graduated from the U of M before heading to Parsons in 2008, gets much of her

inspiration from traveling to places like Scandinavia and Berlin, and from style websites. In addition to keeping tabs on favorite designers like Phillip Lim, Alexander Wang and Swedish brand Acne, she follows street fashion blogs like Jak & Jil, Garance Doré and Still in Berlin. She works out of a clean, white studio in the California Building in Northeast, sells her clothes at Design Collective in Uptown and just opened an online store at FrancesZerr.com.

Zerr isn't sure where she'll end up. She knows she's not yet ready to pursue her ultimate dream of owning a boutique/studio space, so in the meantime, she hopes to land a job designing for a fashion house. "I've seen, what, three years of the industry?" she says. "I love doing my own thing, but still have much to learn."

Zerr's Voltage collection, which she'll unveil at the First Avenue show on April 15, consists of classic trench coats, blazers, pencil skirts and floor-length skirts, mixed with activewear like gym shorts, sports bras and leotards, styled with tube socks, briefcases and men's watches. Her mostly neutral palette will feature pops of red, navy and camel with some athletic-themed screenprints. It's a gutsy venture to be sure, but judging from the carefully constructed, chic nature of her previous work, this ambitious young designer is up to the task.