

MAX LOHRBACH

32 | FASHION DESIGNER

Hails from: Mantorville, Minn.

Why he's a keeper: Max Lohrbach, one of local fashion's most beloved designers, lives in a decrepit old house in southern Minnesota. He spends his days drawing, sewing, painting and doing crossword puzzles. He doesn't own a computer or a television set, and pays no attention to fashion magazines. It is precisely this low-tech, unmuddled lifestyle that drives Lohrbach's unique, detailed and historically inspired fashion.

History has always been important to Lohrbach and it shows in his couture creations, which have graced runways across the Twin Cities. His Spring 2009 finale collection for Voltage: Fashion Amplified (one of Minnesota's premier fashion events) featured hand-painted patchwork silk gowns with deli-

cate bow cutouts, long gloves and tulle hats perfect for an early 20th-century garden party. Some of the models had torn and frayed Lohrbach original paintings cartoonishly smashed around their torsos as though they'd just gotten in a fight at an art gallery. One model wore a two-piece playsuit with high-waisted bloomers and antique Benjamin-Franklin-style glasses on a chain around her neck.

Trained in millinery, shoemaking and sewing, the 32-year-old fashion history buff has been making clothes for more than ten years. He lives frugally, selling vintage threads on eBay and runway samples at Design Collective, and fulfilling orders for custom designs through word-of-mouth recommendations (no website for this designer). Lohrbach is thinking about putting on a solo runway show this spring and if so, would include a chapbook of illustrations and inspiration drawings. The only thing that could take him away from home, he says, would be a phone call from a major couture house. In the meantime, he'll be plugging away—unplugged—in his 1890s house in small-town Minnesota, which, for the moment, is right where he belongs.

On quality: "I like when people have really good, well-made stuff. You know, when they're under-stitching their facings and just getting it right. Good hems. I like good hems."

On vintage clothes: "Years ago, I went to Via's Vintage Wear when [the late] Via Vento used to run it and I got a job there. She ran down the basics for me and taught me what makes a good dress or shirt. Business was slow back then so I just got to study every piece of clothing. That didn't just influence me picking out clothes, but also what I think about design. I still have a number of really killer pieces from her: a 1940s silky, rayon, zebra-print men's shirt, an antique baseball uniform."

On living media-free: "It makes me draw a lot. I like to read. The computer thing I miss out on a little bit, but there are only certain things I really do online. I don't really like movies. I don't really care about music either. I just care about visual stuff." — M.O.

