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STYLE

# 10 rising stars build Colorado's fashion reputation

**Emerging talent: Ten fashion labels are tailoring a following and building the Rocky Mountains' reputation for style innovation.**

By **Suzanne S. Brown**  
The Denver Post



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The fashion industry in Colorado once was mostly about snow and cycling gear. Not anymore.

From fine jewelry and upscale kids clothes to custom handcrafted leather bags and organic cotton shirts, the range of fashion products and companies has grown. Many of the companies are small and home-based; others employ dozens and sell abroad, as well as domestically.

Ten such labels and two retailers will be recognized Oct. 23 when Fashion Group International of Denver hosts its biannual Rising Star salute to designers that have been in business five years or less.

While none of these Colorado labels threatens to knock Marc Jacobs or Donna Karan off their fashion pedestals, they're earning a following, even in a tough



DVLP: Rustin Coburn and Noah Price have taken DVLP from a Durango firm creating original artwork T-shirts to a Denver-based company that sells its collections for men, women and children across the country and in Canada and Europe. (Photo by Don Hales )

have to them selling online, for example."

The emergence of a fashion community locally has followed expansion of the music and art worlds, says



BornFit: When Colorado natives Lisa Welch and Julie Hill couldn't find clothes to match their active lifestyles during their pregnancies, they created their own line of tops, shorts, pants, skorts and jackets to wear while they ran, practiced yoga and played tennis. The popularity of BornFit led to their creating a line of "relaxed fit" styles for nonpregnant women. (Photo by Kit Williams )

economy.

They're doing it through careful targeting of their market and by using a variety of means to reach their customers, including online sales and trunk shows, sponsoring athletes, and using blogging and social-networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

"I've been really surprised at the innovativeness of the design field here in Colorado," says Elaine Mariner, executive director of the Colorado Council of the Arts, a division of the state's economic development office. She was a judge in the Rising Star competition.

"There's a unique aesthetic that merges the Western theme with what's hip and trendy. Colorado has a high concentration of creative occupations, and that's extending to fashion design."

Another judge, Jim Stevens, owner of The Garment District, was impressed with the variety of fashion companies starting up. "Some seem to be thoroughly at the top of their game on how to bring their goods to market. They're thinking through the reaction retailers might

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Carol Engel-Enright, who coordinated selection of the award honorees.

"Companies are targeting niches and finding an audience," she says, whether they're focusing on pregnant women who want to keep doing yoga and other exercises, as Born Fit is doing, or skaters and snowboarders who want individualistic urban wear like the styles produced by DVLP clothing brand. Engel-Enright is the internship coordinator in Colorado State University's fashion design and merchandising department and regularly sends students to work for such companies.

So why aren't the companies seeking their fame and fortune in New York or Los Angeles, with much larger fashion industries? "The quality of life here is attractive," she says, and the ability to source materials and manufacture lines has improved, so the companies are staying in Colorado.

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Eulanda Sanders' Shibori-felted recycled wool scarf. ( | )

## Rising Star Awards

The Rising Star Awards, presented by Fashion Group International of Denver, will be held from 6-10 p.m. Oct. 23 at Mercedes-Benz of Westminster, 10391 Westminster Blvd. A reception and silent auction will be followed by an awards program and fashion show. Tickets start at \$50 for general admission (\$25 for students). Proceeds will be used for fashion- student scholarships and educational outreach programs. Reservations at [blacktie-colorado.com/rsvp](http://blacktie-colorado.com/rsvp), event code: risingstar or call 720-341-9896.

A dozen to watch

*Designs from the following individuals and companies will be shown on the runway at the Rising Star Awards, and one company will be chosen as the 2009 Rising Star:*

Art wearable: Susan Kiely, SK Designs, Women With a Cause; [womenwithacause.com](http://womenwithacause.com)

Jewelry: Andrea Li, [andreali.com](http://andreali.com)

Dresses: Stephanie Ohnmacht, Smooch; [smoochstyle.com](http://smoochstyle.com)

Women's sportswear: Lisa Welch and Julie Hill, BornFit; [livebornfit.com](http://livebornfit.com)

Custom design: Maureen de Haan, Denver Couture; [denvercouture.com](http://denvercouture.com)

Outdoor/activewear: Phoebe Stapleton, Sierra Designs; [sierradesigns.com](http://sierradesigns.com)

Urban/streetwear: Rustin Coburn and Noah Price, DVLP Clothing; [developclothing.com](http://developclothing.com)

Children's wear: Holli Gibson, LamanBlu; [lamanblu.com](http://lamanblu.com)

Accessories: Eulanda Sanders, Yo-San Studio; [yosanstudio.com](http://yosanstudio.com)

Men's Wear: Josh Holleb and Jesse Sapir, Totem Industries; [totemindustries.com](http://totemindustries.com)

Retail Winner: Mona Lucero, [monalucero.com](http://monalucero.com)

Interior Design Winner: Jeanne Connolly, Vintage Renewal; [vintagerenewal.com](http://vintagerenewal.com)

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One rising star this article missed is Brandi Shigley and her crew at Fashion Denver. Brandi and Fashion Denver have done so much to bring great local designers, artists, and consumers together to celebrate fashion and ingenuity. Brandi and the crew host fashion markets - fun and eclectic events that feature a wide variety of local designers and merchandise - like the one at TAXI this last weekend.

Hats off to these other designers too, but Brandi deserves recognition for creating and enhancing Denver's fashion culture for sure.

 Motha F | 11:37 AM on Thursday Oct 15

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