

Glossy PEOPLE

ROSE OF TEXAS

Dallas-raised fashion designer talks about her love of fabric, Austin restaurants and flats

By Jenny Miller

SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN STATESMAN

It must be true what they say: You can take the girl out of Texas, but you can't take Texas out of the girl. Native Texan Lela Rose, best known for her lighthearted "day into cocktail" dresses, has lived in New York City for years but credits the Lone Star State for her love of color and lightweight fabrics.

At home in Manhattan, the 37-year-old Rose — who was raised in Dallas — represents a vibrant flash in a city whose residents are known for a more somber palette (especially as she tools around on her custom-made triocycle with dog and

her line of dresses and separates, the designer has created a collection of shoes for Payless Shoe Source that will debut in August. Asked for a count of her own shoe collection, Rose demurred. "Let's just say it's grotesque. I wouldn't put a number on it because my husband might read this and divorce me."

Glossy caught up with the designer recently at the new Neiman Marcus at the Domain while she was in Austin for a customer luncheon and trunk show. In addition to Neiman's, Lela Rose designs are available at Nordstrom at Barton Creek



palette (especially as she darts around on her custom-made tricycle with dog and two young children in tow). In addition to

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Dan Lecca photos

Lela Rose says that growing up in Texas has influenced her design decisions.

Glossy: Were you into fashion growing up?

Lela Rose: I was. My mother has always been very into fashion, but much more avant garde. She introduced me to Yohji Yamamoto eons ago and Comme des Garçons — really interesting, cutting-edge fashion. I think I've always loved fashion because of her.

Who else has influenced you, fashion-wise?

I would say the two designers I've worked for in the past, which have been Christian Francis Roth and Richard Tyler. Christian I worked for while I was at Parsons getting a fashion degree, and then I worked for Richard as soon as I graduated. They were both very talented designers, and it had to be wonderful fabric and just impeccable quality. That's something that's stayed with me throughout. Fabric for me is the biggest inspiration — it's how I start every collection.

Where do you get your fabrics?

Well, there's a fabric show in Paris twice a year, which I always go to. It's this huge fabric emporium, and for someone who loves fabrics it's kind of heaven. I sometimes go to the mills in Italy, but not as much. I find I can do most of it in Paris.

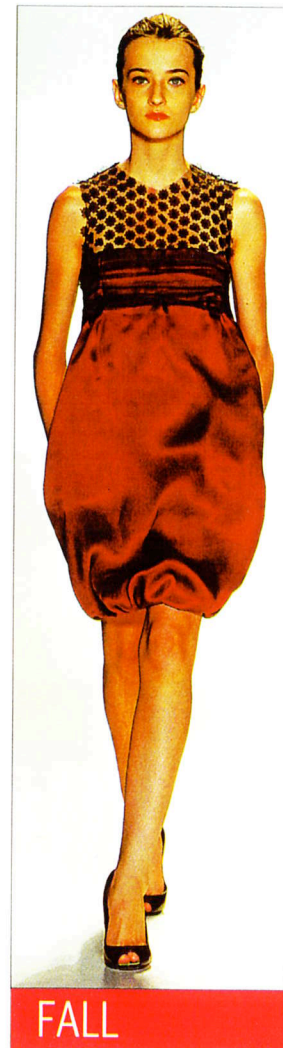
Have you spent much time in Austin?

I, of course, came here some growing up. But I've not spent near enough time in Austin. I think it's such a great place. And everyone in New York, whenever we talk about Texas, people always talk about Austin. Austin's where everyone wants to go.

Have you done any shopping here?

Well, I've done some shopping here at the Neiman's, but I haven't done any other shopping here. I have had some darn good meals in Austin. The Salt Lick — delicious. And Jeffrey's — that was fabulous.

You're wearing one of your dresses today. Do you usually wear your own clothes?



For Rose, design begins with the fabric. 'I don't tend toward heavier fabrics and I think that's partially from where I grew up,' she says.

Uh-huh. I wear them all the time. I feel like I'm really the customer for our clothing. I could live in a dress. Even when it's cold out in the morning, I just put on tights. We have pockets in pretty much every single dress we do. You can put keys in there, your lipstick.

What's your approach to accessorizing your dresses?
I always love to have a little

cardigan. We do a lot of knits for our collection, and we always do cardigans. I always feel like you just need a pair of earrings and you're good to go. And frankly, flats. I used to wear heels all the time, but in New York it gets to be so painful because you're walking all the time. Or biking — I bike everywhere.

When you're designing a dress, how do you make sure

that it's going to look good with flats?

You know, it has a lot to do with the length, and I also feel like it's great with flats if it has a teeny bit of volume to it. All dresses look great with flats. I think it is a little bit harder with heels, though. Keeping the length above the knee is a way of making sure it looks good with flats. We're generally conditioned to flats now, though. I think they

look good with most clothing.

On a different note, one thing that I've been curious about is the origin of trends. How does it happen that designers come out with collections that feature the same elements at the same time?

People always ask me about color — how designers come up with the same color sense. And that is really derived from the

fabric shows. You know, you go to these shows and you start seeing different variations of greens. It's a very subliminal thing, but you'll get back home and you'll say, "Oh, I love green!" So that's how most designers end up in a similar vein. But with the trends this spring it was one of the most astounding things to me that a handful of us had rosettes. I have no idea how we all ended up with that. Because when we're in our design studios, we're pretty much in there, working. The rosettes threw me.

How do you go about approaching a collection when you're just beginning to design it?

Well, again, for me it really starts with fabric. I start compiling fabrics that I love. The spring collection was a fun way to go about it. There's that very iconic Cecil Beaton picture — it was in Vogue — and it's of all these Charles James dresses. They were big ball gowns. I picked our entire color palette from that picture. There were great greens and oranges, and this kind of blue. It's always fun to take things that I've always loved over the years and looked back at them and think, "What are the elements that I like about that and what can I draw from that?"

Do you think that having grown up in Texas influences your clothes?

Absolutely. No. 1, black has never been an important color for me. I think that my sense of color has always come from my upbringing because I think that the women in Texas have always really used color. I also like the way they put fabrics together and also the weight of the fabrics. I don't tend toward heavier fabrics and I think that's partially from where I grew up.

One last question: Is Lela Rose your given name?

It is. I'm lucky. I've always loved this name. People have always called me "Lila" or "Layla," but I still love this name.