



## Design Within Reach

The first lady has set the tone for embracing young designers. Is Washington ready to follow suit?

| By Stephanie Kanowitz |

There's always been a stigma attached to being a fashion designer in DC. The thinking went: You're only an Acela away from New York, after all, so clearly you just couldn't make it in Manhattan. But, like so much else in Washington these days, that's starting to change. Two new, up-and-coming creatives think there's no better place than here to ply their trade.

"DC just recently woke up and was like, 'Wow, we have all these great people here,'" says Taimur Baig, CEO and creative director of clothing line Mirza Mperial ([mirzampieral.com](http://mirzampieral.com)). "There's art here, and not just in the museums—it's everywhere; it's in the street; it's in the 'hood. If I'd done this four years ago, I might have gone completely unnoticed."

Baig, 25, recently launched his second collection with an elaborate runway show at the hipster lounge L2. The Dubai native, raised in Karachi, Pakistan, until age 11, nabbed an internship at Kenneth Cole a decade after he emigrated to the U.S. with his Indian-born parents. His own line borrows Cole's predilection for sportswear, but the designs are artful and architectural, if not a bit over-thought. "It always starts with a piece of writing," says Baig.

In this case, it was a Hafez poem about illumination, which he says led him to moths. "They chase light their entire lives." The result: a geometric showcase featuring a bolero jacket with 3-D gold silk organza cubes, a cocoon-like cotton hooded tank, a leopard moth-print dress in the shape of the insect's silhouette and a metallic moth-wing bolero.

Baig's line hasn't yet found a home outside his own Web site, but Potomac-native Martí Horwitz ([marticompany.com](http://marticompany.com)) is already stocking the shelves with her sophomore collection at Tabandeh, Wink, Emily Grace and B Scene. The 29-year-old, who studied at Parsons before graduating from the American InterContinental University in London, has designed a mix-and-match line reminiscent of early Diane von Furstenberg. Horwitz's ruched jersey designs transition from day to night with the release of a hook and eye. For spring, she's softened the color palette on dresses that price out at about \$500.

Horwitz says DC is ideal for industry newcomers. "It's a smaller town than New York, so you can get more feedback and make more of an impact." Baig agrees, "It's better to make a mistake when less people are watching than to be out in the arena and completely fall flat on your ass." ■



### RUNWAY PROJECTIONS

Martí Horwitz returned home to DC to launch her collection and is cutting a swath of ruched navy jersey in her wake. Taimur Baig hopes Washington is ready for his crème de la crème, outsize designs—complete with angular shoulders and cocoon hoodies.