

MODERN LUXURY

CS

# RESTAURANT ISSUE 2014

*The 50 Finest*

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# TAKING FLIGHT

LAGI NADEAU'S NAME MEANS 'SKY' IN SAMOAN—AND HER NEW LINE SHOWS THAT IT MAY BE HER ONLY LIMIT.

By Kristin J. Larson  
Portrait by Katrina Wittkamp

"In my opinion, Lagi Nadeau's style is close to a glamorous version of a Kate Spade—with a twist," says Andrea Schwartz. "She is strong, and she knows her customer." That's high praise from Schwartz, a vice president at Macy's, who has seen her share of work from established and emerging designers. The department store's enormous Loop location houses Chicago's Fashion Incubator, a boathouse fast becoming known for discovering the city's most talented young designers, including Christina Fan of C/Fan and Agga B., among others. But the Incubator is putting a lot of faith into Nadeau. She was the first person in its six-year history to stay on for a second term—a sure sign that they see big things ahead for this young womenswear designer.

Nadeau, a native of Ann Arbor, Mich., moved to Chicago to launch her ready-to-wear line in February 2012 after completing a one-year accelerated program at FIT in New York and gaining real-world experience at fashion houses Tahari and Ammara.

The intensity of those episodes, she says, prepared her for running her own company. "It was good coming straight from design school to see how the real world is—that design and sales go hand in hand," she says. "I learned that you have to roll with things as they come." Nadeau's new collection features anything her buyer might want to wear: sweaters, skirts, pants, dresses, blouses, outerwear—even jewelry. "I want to give her a range of pieces," she says of her customer. "She is somebody who likes to mix and play, someone who likes the whole look."

After initially struggling to define her spring 2014 collection, the half Samoan, half French designer found inspiration in one stylish, if not unlikely, muse: her grandmother, Carol Lahti. "After spending a week at her place in Michigan, everything



[STYLE]  
PEOPLE

came together," Nadeau says. The octogenarian artist, who had encouraged Nadeau's creativity as a child by buying her painting supplies, inspired everything from the line's blue color story ("Her favorite color—and luckily big for the season") to the thoughtful detailing (ruffles on two of the dresses echo waterfalls near where Lahti lives).

But don't let the grandmotherly inspiration fool you; her pieces are intended for a hip crowd. Her smart detailing (and more specifically, her zipper tassels) caught the attention of Mark Gill and Tina Kourasis, owners of uberexclusive Oak Street boutique VMR, who saw Nadeau wearing her work during the Macy's Chicago Flower Show and fell in love; they will soon be carrying several pieces of her fall/winter 2014 collection. Nadeau's pieces also are available at Paul Stuart, which picked up several of her styles for their private house label, and are on display every night at Japonais by Morimoto, where she created a sophisticated yet sexy uniform for waitresses in the Blue Room Lounge.

It's these exciting developments, along with Nadeau's drive and unbridled talent, that have industry observers betting on her to make it. "I hope to see her at New York Fashion Week in the next few years," says Schwartz, "on the national stage."

**IN STITCHES**  
Industry observers say Lagi Nadeau may be the Fashion Incubator's next big designer. At left, the Zoo trends (\$895) and Chloe pant (\$425).

BOOKS PHOTO: ROBERT PETERSON