

EXCLUSIVE: Netflix Next In Fashion's Charles Lu Speaks on Exploitation and LOSING \$100k

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Charles Lu won the hearts of Tan France, Alexa Chung and viewers worldwide—becoming a treasured Canadian designer through the process.

[Charles Lu](#) brought the GTA to the runway. Born and residing in Hamilton, he was the only Canadian contestant on the wildly popular [Netflix series Next In Fashion](#). A gifted textile mason, he continually presented highly wearable outfits with a dash of avant-garde.

Charles seldom designed beyond evening wear previous to Next In Fashion. Inexperience didn't stop him from adapting briskly; through each challenge he seamlessly transitioned between nautical, athletic and streetwear among others—prior to facing elimination shortly before the finale.

Despite his natural gift of design, Charles has faced repeated hardships. Past employers have stolen his work; leaving him uncredited as others bask in praise. "I've had months and months of backbreaking work stolen. It feels like everyone's clapping for a person who's not me"—says Charles, who reached a breaking point while working in Dubai for Arushi Couture until 2019.

Charles lost out on \$100,000 Canadian dollars through legal fees and missed payments from Mireille Loughlin of Arushi Couture.

"Arushi Couture hired me to scald a burning fire. The company had no marketing budget or social media. The clothes were all made to measure—with no passive income through ready-to-wear collections. I later discovered the company was already in huge debt and latching on to partners for funding."

"Mine and my colleague's pay was continually delayed over the years. They'd pay us for one month, yet they were behind for two or more."

"I directed a total of 3 collections for which I wasn't paid. I recall being at a Swarovski event and discovered I was uncredited on a collection. I could tell I was slowly being separated from the company and eventually faced termination. Mireille then tried forcing me to delete my Instagram and photos of my work."

Upon dismissal, Charles was wrongly misinformed into believing he couldn't seek work or start his own line for a year after termination—a lie devised by Mireille out of fear, seeing Charles as competition.

"When you're talented, people will take from you without thinking twice or feeling bad. Young designers are habitually exploited by fashion houses. As mentioned I've had designs stolen and missed payments. I remember interning in London and having to clean the floor on my knees when the vacuum broke, asking myself if this was really fashion. Here I had a sketchbook containing hundreds of prototypes stolen from me."

Charles boldly triumphs over his adversities, knowing it's his life's purpose to design fashion. Despite his many poor working environments, he's gained thicker skin through the process. Through networking in London, Charles met the stylist who would later invite him to participate in Next In Fashion. The competition began immediately after Charles left Dubai in spring of 2019.

"I entered Next In Fashion broke with nothing to lose. I set out to test that I'm a good designer and that I could do it. After the show aired, I gained a loving global audience who taught me I couldn't hold back any longer. I was always designing under constraints, but now I'm setting out to create a brand that's transparent and representative of my beliefs in fashion." Despite his success on Next In Fashion, COVID-19 erased Charles' opportunities for partnerships and collaborations.

As determined by law, Mireille Loughlin owes Charles nearly \$75,000 Canadian dollars. Charles has not yet received any money, and Mireille has fled Dubai to his knowledge.

"Design with a humble heart. I constantly make mistakes but get better each time. That's how designers find their own voice. Through hardships and inspirations you'll become an amalgamation and evolution of what came before".

Charles' birthday was on March 1st. His gift to himself was the reclamation of power and truth. "I had to lose everything in order to understand what I needed most in my life; a brand so unapologetically me." For assistance on his new line, Charles has [launched a GoFundMe](#) in support of his brand—kindly asking for donations and shares.

Charles doesn't intend to dissuade enthusiasts from fashion—but rather to enter with a strong heart and be keenly observant. His injustices remind new designers to document all forms of business conduct, as exploitation is inevitable from all frontiers. "Fashion is excruciatingly difficult—design with a humble heart. I make plenty of mistakes but get better each time. It's how I find my voice. Through hardships and inspiration, you'll become an amalgamation and evolution of what came before."

Keep up with Charles: [@charles_lu](#) for his public life

[@Charles_Lu](#) for his design work

And at www.charles-lu.com to see his collections.