

NO BRAND IS AN ISLAND

words by MAYA AVRAM

By design, islands evoke notions of isolation and detachment — but also self-actualisation and mysticism. In John Donne’s *No Man is an Island*, the metaphor explores humanity’s place in the world, asserting that interconnectedness is the foundation of the human experience.

In today’s globalised world, it’s easier than ever for islanders to share their unique perspectives. We speak to three fashion designers who reflect on the parallels — and contrasts — between their homelands and the industrialised islands of New York and Great Britain, where they first found footing in the industry.

designer **KRYSTAL PANIAGUA** photographs by **PAVIELLE GARCIA**

When Puerto Rican knitwear designer Krystal Paniagua began her fashion education — earning a degree from New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology and London’s Royal College of Art — she didn’t immediately realise the influence her heritage had on her work. Yet moving away from home, and later founding her namesake knitwear brand during Covid — two isolating experiences in their own right — only deepened her connection to her Caribbean identity.

“Decadence is a common theme — lacking resources but making it work with what you have. Latin communities are more informed by people than their surroundings because the infrastructure is very unstable. So we rely on family, the warmth and goodness of people and, of course, nature, because it’s beautiful there.”

Navigating uncertainty forced Paniagua to become resourceful and agile. *“I like working with the things that surround me; I don’t care about perfection, but about the nature of things — and the nature of things is imperfect.”* This ethos of resilience ties closely to her creative process. *“My grandmother’s house was a major inspiration. I’ve used this picture that I took of her sitting on the sofa in a moodboard — the background is quite messy. My family actually gets very angry when I show that picture, saying, ‘Why are you showing that when we have more beautiful ones?’ But this is what captures me, this is what shaped me.”*

Paniagua’s ability to transform unexpected sources into fully realised creative ideas set her apart in the concrete landscapes of Manhattan and London. For her, adaptability is a transferable skill — and an advantage. *“I love working with limitations because they force me to find the sweet spot between working with what I have and figuring out how to make something different.”*





designer **FELISHA NOEL** photographs by **ITAYSHA JORDAN**

Felisha Noel has spent her life bridging worlds, as a first-generation American born to Grenadian parents who immigrated to New York. While the Caribbean island has always instilled in her an effortless sense of belonging, New York contributed grit, energy, and, crucially, a deep-rooted community spirit.

“Brooklyn is such a Caribbean culture melting pot — from Grenada to Trinidad to Haiti to Jamaica — that the diaspora formed a culture of its own. The Fe Noel brand is a representation of how that connection makes me feel.”

One of Fe Noel’s signature pieces, the wilted-sleeve robe, pays homage to the robes worn by women in her family. Presenting an iteration embroidered with nutmegs — Grenada’s main export — to her grandmother marked a full-circle moment, a reconciliation between Caribbean nostalgia and Brooklyn’s urban culture.

“Grenada is a very small Caribbean island, not very well-known. So through my clothes, I am constantly teaching and telling stories, letting people know that beautiful places exist that they might not know about. It’s important to bridge these gaps because that’s how we get to experience each other’s cultures. As long as I keep designing collections, I’m always going to connect the dots for people and show them my why.”

Looking ahead, Noel imagines her brand as a platform for cultural exchange — both for the next generation and for her community at large. *“I want to use joy as an act of resistance to all that’s going on in the world. There’s power in community, in gathering, and in creating a space for people to just be themselves.”*



designer AMESH WIJESKERA photographs by GREGOR SEIFERT

Since returning from London to his native Sri Lanka, Amesh Wijeskera has been using his namesake brand as both a platform for creative expression and a catalyst for community building. Over the past decade, the LVMH Prize semi-finalist has cultivated close relationships with artisans and hand-weavers across Sri Lanka, celebrating the island's vibrant spirit and craft heritage.

Among his greatest inspirations is Sri Lanka's multicultural identity. *"The Sinhallas, the Tamils, the Muslims, the Burghers, the Christians — these communities influence my practice."* It's also what he admired about London. *"London is very expressive, people can be themselves there. It has so many subcultures and tribes. That made me realise that there is a consumer market for the clothes I make — garments with classic shapes and styles, but with the textiles and storytelling from an island."*

For Wijeskera, the heart of the story lies in a love of process. In London, he observed a disjointed supply chain where production often spans several countries for a single garment. Back home, he opts for a slower, considered approach — producing locally, offering small-scale, annual drops.

"When you become a big business, you're only looking at targets and you lose touch with the creative process of making things. For me, that was the most important thing. Everything starts from a thread and a yarn, and that's how I design. I don't want to get so big that I lose the human touch, the process of creating and experimenting."

Though their origins differ, each designer's relationship with East and West is guided by an internal compass. Through storytelling, community building, and process-driven design, their shared ethos champions gratitude in creation, a reverence for people and craft — and, above all, boundless ingenuity.