



# THE BIGGER PICTURE

The public's perception of Donna Karan is defined by her design credentials, but there's much more to NYC's woman in black

By DEBORAH BEE

Photographer ANNA SCHORI

Interview film by NIKITA K. CARPENTER JR and PAT MADDOX

# D

## DID YOUR CHILDHOOD INFLUENCE YOUR LIFE?

I was born on 7th Avenue, the place in New York City where fashion is born. My mother worked there as a showroom model; my father made custom

suits for men – and for my mother. Fashion was in my blood.

## DID YOU KNOW EARLY ON THAT YOU WANTED TO BE IN FASHION?

I absolutely never wanted to be in fashion or be a fashion designer. I wanted to dance like Martha Graham and sing like Barbra Streisand. But I wasn't a good enough dancer or singer. Then I wanted to be an artist, an illustrator. I went to Women's Wear Daily and they said, "You'd better take up design." So I went to Parsons School of Design, but I didn't finish my training there – I failed draping! Kind of funny. I went to work for Anne Klein as a summer job and they said: "Why go back to school when you're doing what you want to do?" I said: "Well, I have to finish school!" But I never did. Until recently: I got my diploma.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNG SELF?

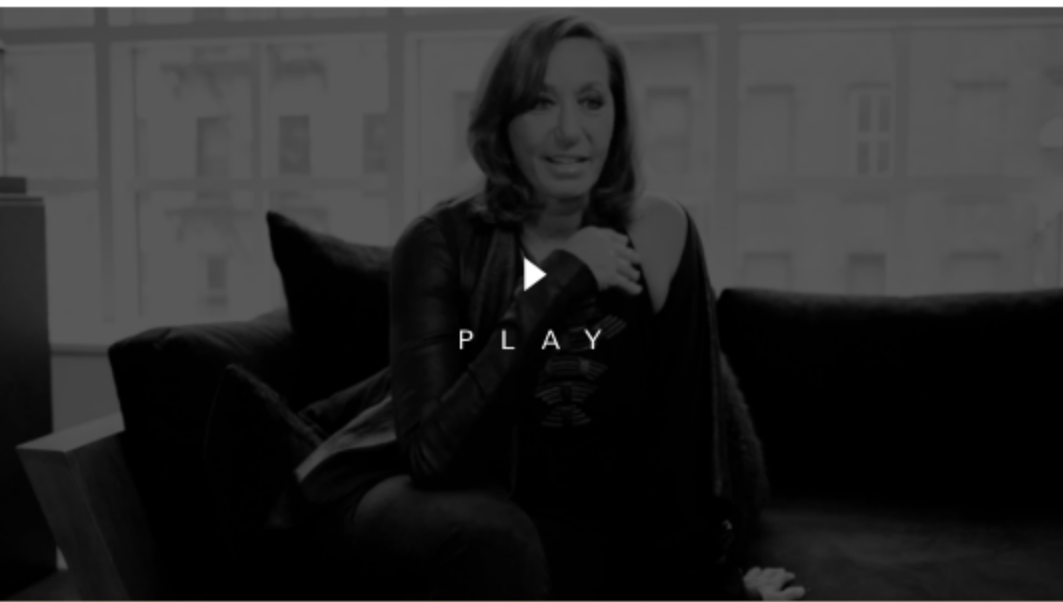
Travel more, see more. I say to my students at Parsons: go out and feel the world. You know, pay community service. See other things before you settle in, because once you've got that job, you're hooked. I've been on 7th Avenue my whole life.

## HAS THE WORKPLACE CHANGED FOR WOMEN?

I think it's easier today to empower yourself to go out into the world. But I never saw myself as a woman or a man: I was a designer. It was other people who said: "Oh, you're a woman designer." I suppose the fact that my mother was a working woman made it easier for me. When I was at school, she was the only mother who worked – and that was unusual.

## WHY DID YOUR CLOTHES MAKE SUCH AN INSTANT IMPRESSION?

When I started, I was simply designing for myself. I'd been into yoga since I was younger and I was always wearing a bodysuit so I was like, OK, what can I wear day to evening? Clothes then were either "ladies who lunch", or women were wearing men's clothes: suit, tie, shirt. There was no sensuality or clothes that took me from work to play to travel. That was where my passion for black came from. Wear a red jacket and it's like: "Oh, I already wore that red jacket"; black takes you from day to night without being too obvious.



*"I never wanted to be a fashion designer. I wanted to dance like Martha Graham and sing like Barbra Streisand"*

DONNA KARAN

#### WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IN?

I believe in not only dressing people but addressing them. I think I'm very sensitive to people and what they're going through. When the AIDS epidemic broke out and we started Seventh on Sale [an NYC benefit launched in response to the impact of the disease within the fashion industry], I realised you have to build an awareness with consumers. From my yoga practice, I also learned the importance of the mind, the body and the spirit. The holistic me.

#### YOU EMBRACED YOGA BEFORE MOST PEOPLE HAD EVEN HEARD OF IT...

I started yoga at 18. For me, being is yoga. People say: "Donna, do us a yoga pose," and I say, "I'm doing it!" Yoga is not putting your legs around your head. Yoga should be taught in schools because it helps with attention. People used to go, "Oh, there goes Donna and her woo-woo trips"; everybody's walking around with a yoga mat now.

#### HOW EASY IS IT TO BLEND COMMERCE AND PHILANTHROPY?

We can't just sit in our isolated world called "fashion". I've always been involved in the bigger picture, it was never about design only. Design is craft, it's art, it's soul and it's spirit. It's part of the whole picture. Since my husband passed away from lung cancer, I've realised that there are healthcare and other issues that need to be aired.





# *Peak perfection*

Quebec's mountainous Charlevoix region seduces visitors,  
whatever the season

By SARAH GILBERT



I

'll never forget the moment. Black cormorants were flying and the craggy cliffs, festooned with green lichen, reflected like Rorschach inkblots on the slate-blue water. The swish of paddles, until the silence was broken by the cry of: "Whales at 2 o'clock!" A few metres away, I watched two beluga whales put on an acrobatic display. Just one of the highlights of sea kayaking on the St Lawrence River in the bucolic region of Charlevoix.

Charlevoix is also the birthplace of the world-renowned Cirque du Soleil and one of its co-founders is using his creativity and capital to draw visitors. After buying Le Massif – Canada's highest ski mountain east of the Rockies, whose wintry delights include tobogganing, snowshoeing, ice kayaking and snowmobiling – Quebec native Daniel Gauthier acquired the old railway line from Quebec City to La Malbaie, so visitors could appreciate the majestic area all year round.

To see if he succeeded, I took a trip there this autumn. I was captivated by the view from Le Train du Massif de Charlevoix as it rumbled past Montmorency Falls, a cascade of water higher than Niagara; the picturesque village of Saint-Joachim, one of Canada's earliest colonial settlements; then fields of corn that gave way to marsh.

The train dropped me at Baie-Saint-Paul station, almost at the door of Hôtel La Ferme, the third element of Gauthier's project. Emphasising the community collaboration, local artisans made everything at this minimalist eco-chic hotel – from troubled-teens-turned-carpenters to ladies who create hand-loomed throws using age-old techniques.

At the Sunday farmers' market, I sampled produce from the region's vineyards, smokehouses, bijoux cheesemakers and artisan bakers. The following morning, I took an exhilarating motorcycle sidecar journey along Charlevoix's snaking roads, stopping at an emu farm to sample the gamey meat and apply emu oil – which apparently cures everything from wrinkles to joint pain.

Along the coast at Tadoussac, the warm, fresh water of the Saguenay River collides with the frigid salt water of the St Lawrence, churning up krill and attracting humpback and blue whales, from May to mid-October. Our Zodiac boat bobbed up and down in the midst of a boisterous group of sea lions, before fin and minke whales, some as long as 20 feet, joined the party.

Back at Hôtel La Ferme, I soaked in the Spa du Verger's alfresco hot pool, then found a cosy spot in front of the log fire with a glass of Prémices d'Avril, the local maple wine. At Les Labours restaurant, chefs conjured up a gourmet take on Quebec's quintessential dish, poutine, with fingerling potatoes and a slab of organic foie gras, followed by local rainbow trout and flavourful micro-brewed beer from Baie-Saint-Paul.

The return journey to Quebec City was as leisurely as the first. Inside the fortified walls of Old Quebec, horse-drawn calèches (carriages) clattered down cobbled streets. In the lower town, the stalls of Le Marché du Vieux-Port heave under the weight of sun-ripened corn; enormous blueberries; Île d'Orléans blackcurrant wine; pear cider; charcuterie; and artisan chocolate.

To work off these gastronomic delights, I took a stroll along the Governors' Promenade, a scenic cliffside boardwalk, and climbed the long staircase up to the Plains of Abraham for views over the entire city, including the fairy-tale turrets of the Fairmont Le Château Frontenac, which opened as a hotel in 1893 and has recently undergone a US\$75 million renovation.

That night, I sampled a creative cocktail at Bistro Le Sam before tucking into chef Stéphane Modat's cutting-edge Québec cuisine on the terrace of Champlain Restaurant, overlooking the St Lawrence. Passenger ferries sauntered up and down instead of whales, and electric lights twinkled instead of stars, but it was no less magnificent for that.