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For Intl. Women's Day, Nolcha Highlights Female Fashion Designers

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
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Karen Hansen and Laura Rachlin

The Nolcha Shows, a leading award-winning event held during New York Fashion Week for global independent fashion designers, was a celebration of International Women's Day by highlighting female fashion designers that are rising stars of the industry with their social and cultural goals. Special focus was given to their ethical fashion brands that are Made in USA and hit the runway this season.

"Our company's mission is very personal; we take all aspects of the company to heart," said designers Karen Hansen and Laura Rachlin of Wren & Roch. "We've put our personal story on display to promote a major social/cultural change, so we do our best to perform due diligence as it relates to manufacturing,

sourcing and overall quality. Our story and mission are raw as is our effort to provide the best products possible to those who support our work."

The mission of Wren & Roch handbags is to empower survivors of rape, domestic violence and sexual abuse. At the intersection of high fashion and giving back, each Wren & Roch handbag, proudly made in New York City, financially benefits selected chosen charities while positively impacting lives by raising awareness, eliminating stigmas, and educating for the prevention of abuse. Inspired by courageous and resilient women, the brand's meticulous attention to detail and versatile designs unite a rich combination of sultry and chic, with a rebellious edge.



(Source:Courtesy Wren & Roch)

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Rachlin and Hansen said that they would love to see the rest of the fashion world also take a stance on an issue they are personally passionate about solving. They note that in 2015, the United Nations released 17 Sustainable Development Goals they plan to achieve by 2030, saying, "If everyone were to align with one or more of these goals (our main goal is #5, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls), we could actively work together to leave the world a better place than we found it."

Wren & Roch designers, Karen Hansen and Laura Rachlin, are also the founders of in.design, inc, a nationally recognized commercial interior design firm. While the path to the women's professional success has been inspirational, life behind the scenes holds a very different story. In college, both were victims of rape, one resulting in pregnancy. They continued on, graduating at the top of their program, even with a one-year-old in tow, which turned out to be one of life's greatest blessings.

"Many people assume that victims of abuse are uneducated, weak, not capable of supporting themselves or of maintaining a professional career. That is just not the case," Hansen and Rachlin told EDGE. "We are strong, educated business owners. These types of abuse are what we call equal opportunity offenders. No



(Source:Courtesy Wren & Roch)

group is excluded because of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or socioeconomic background -- it affects all of us."

As both of their careers rapidly progressed and the journey of motherhood gave the gift of five children, they were each dealing with domestic violence at home and discovered that one of their children had been sexually abused by a spouse they trusted. Today, Hansen and Rachlin refuse to carry the burden, shame or embarrassment of rape and abuse. Instead, they carry their courage with their heads held high, on a mission to empower other victims and survivors and wholeheartedly spread the message of awareness and prevention.

"We feel it helps in multiple ways," they said. "Other victims and survivors feel like they are not alone, like they have someone who understands their range of emotions and who believes them without question. It also shows them that if they are still in the phase of blaming themselves, feeling ashamed or being embarrassed, that there is hope for them to let those feelings go and move to the other side of the experience, which is filled with empowerment and courage. We have heard many times that victims and survivors appreciate feeling like someone is

standing up for them and 'fighting to make the world a safer place,' as a recent email from one woman stated."

For more information, visit <http://nolchashows.com/lounge-designers/wren-roch> or www.nolchashows.com

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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