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# GET A JOB

**[Carolyn Simons, Outerwear Designer]**

by Natalie Langman



Photo courtesy of Volcom

Today's shred gear must put up with a lot of abuse—everything from inner-city rails and rough concrete to backcountry hikes, grease-stained snowmobiles, terrain-park laps and extreme weather changes. *And* it must look good while doing it. From a stylistic standpoint, snowboard outerwear has never looked better. Behind these slick outfits are the designers who envision what we all wear on the hill. One such designer is Carolyn Simons, originally from North Vancouver, BC.

Sometimes a phone call can change the course of one's life. Simons got such a call from Volcom while she was working in the Westbeach design office. The caller propositioned her with the position of "female outerwear designer" at its office in Orange County, California. The offer came as a surprise since she never applied for a job or spoke with anyone at Volcom. But she later accepted and is now responsible for the entire women's snowboard clothing line, from design to colourways, from print development to fittings for outerwear, first-layer pieces, sweaters and accessories.

Snowboarding entered Simons' life during her years at Handsworth Secondary, five minutes from the base of Grouse Mountain. Being an avid rider and seamstress, it was no wonder she took every sewing class possible and made "snowboard-inspired" clothing for herself, her brother and his friends. After high school, she enrolled in fashion design and technology at Kwantlen University College in Richmond, BC. Simons focused on fashion design and garment production, specifically in snowboard outerwear, one of her projects being a fully seamed technical snowboard jacket.

"There was something like 105 pattern pieces over three months of work, and lots of sore and burnt fingertips," recalls Simons. "It was a masterpiece."

At the end of the final project, students must create their own line and actually make six pieces that go into the final graduation fashion show. Simons' line was called Snow Show, and the brand was Ennell Designs, a women's high-end outerwear for on and off the hill. The first of many designs in this field, it foreshadowed Simons' future and made a great addition to her portfolio.

To fulfill the course's required retail experience, Carolyn worked part-time at the Westbeach shop on West 4th in Vancouver, and in her third year interned with United Riders, working with Dave Boyce and Dace Moore in outerwear design. In her final year of school, she paid her own way to the SIA tradeshow in Las Vegas where she met up with Dave Susuki, then of IS Design, who introduced her to several people. She handed out business cards left, right and centre, making lots of contacts. One such contact was the CEO of Westbeach, Mickey McDonald. She later received an invitation to one of the company's design meetings and upon graduation attained the title of design assistant. Within a year and a half she was senior designer and had her own assistant.

Working with Westbeach was an invaluable experience for Simons.

"Working at a small company gives you the opportunity to be involved in so many aspects of the garment development process," she says. "At times it's not an opportunity, it's your duty, with lots of long, late nights and weekends, and nights of dreaming of work."

Simons developed the line plan for men's and women's outerwear and street clothing. She worked with the marketing and sales teams and communicated daily with Westbeach's overseas factories, sometimes even traveling to them. She also worked closely with team riders like Jon Cartwright to create signature products.

Cartwright says Simons has been instrumental in shaping Westbeach's product image over the last years.

"Carolyn has a keen eye for style and design. She's young and talented, with an open mind for new ideas and styles," he enthuses. "I spent a fair amount of time working with her on my Rider Style jackets, where she took my initial concept of 'it would be kind of cool to do something like...' and turned it into more of a 'yeah, this jacket is perfect!'"

The transition from Westbeach to Volcom has allowed Simons to concentrate solely on women's clothing. She's striving toward giving the outerwear a unique identity by creating styles, colours, prints and features that women really want, lines that flatter the figure, and colours that look good on the mountain as well as on the street.

"There's a major trend that has developed and continues to develop—the whole street fashion in snow clothing," Simons explains. "It makes it really fun for us designers. It opens up a lot of creative opportunities with fabrics, trims and prints."

Simons misses Canada, although warm weather has eased the adjustment to life in the OC. During her first year at Volcom she's been riding Bear Mountain almost every weekend and has visited Copper and Mammoth. And since the Volcom office is only a few blocks from the beach, she's also taken up surfing. Her dream is to pursue the design of two different extremes—outerwear and bikinis—so for fun she's started her own bikini line under her original Ennell moniker.

Simons' advice for aspiring snowboard designers?

"Be super keen," she says. "A positive attitude will get you the furthest. Learn from everything and everyone."