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LIFE / STYLE | New fashion line called eXhale will make you melt . Page F5

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THE WINDSOR STAR

LIFE / STYLE

DO IT ALL: This crossover top in luscious lime is great for working out, running around town or popping into a cafe for cappuccino.



COMBO 1: Trade the pants for a short flippy skirt and you change the entire feel and proportion of your outfit.



COMBO 2: This combination with the full-sleeved printed Donna shrug dresses up the look instantly.



COMBO 3: All the designs at eXhale are named after staff or friends. Here the Willow, Donna and Bridget are teamed with the flared pant for a finished look that definitely stands out and literally takes you anywhere.



'Like wearing nothing'

"When you put on eXhale, you can do anything. You can dance."

— Willow Flare Couto

BY KAREN HALL
STAR COLUMNIST

Her real name is Beverley Joyce Schulties, but 20 years ago this Australian native realized her given name just didn't reflect the spirit within.

"I had basically travelled the world, and I arrived in New Zealand at the age of 29 to work with Greenpeace. Everybody there had such different names," she remembers. "I went to this festival, and at the end of it I just couldn't take



saying 'Beverley' anymore."

From that moment on she was known as Willow Flare—a far more glamorous, exciting name for a Bohemian woman determined to make her mark in art and fashion.

Working from her beach-front studio, Willow became an image consultant, sculptor and yoga instructor, designing clothes for herself that were so versatile, stylish and comfortable her clients wanted to buy them.

"They said my fabric was like wearing nothing," she says. "It's true. It's divine. You feel sensuous and gorgeous. You just melt. It has its own personality; it relaxes over your entire body."

The microfibre fabric comes from Italy, and Willow thought the blend of nylon and Lycra was perfect for stretching and moving.

And speaking of moving... It was about 5½ years ago that she encountered a Canadian gentleman walking along New Zealand's Palm Beach. "He was looking for the nude beach,"



THE WOMAN HERSELF: Willow Flare Couto models one of her favourite layered outfits.

CHECK IT OUT

For more about eXhale, go to www.exhaleyogawear.com. To see it yourself, go to Your Finest Things, 348 Manning Rd. in the Village Grove Plaza.

she says. "He found me crossing the road."

It was love at first sight. "We spent eight days together, and it was like we'd been married instantly."

At the age of 48, Willow packed everything up, left her studio to the community and arrived in Toronto in the middle of a dull and freezing February.

She added Couto to her name and started teaching yoga and doing some dressmaking to fill her days. Suddenly, there was a whole new client base looking for her clothes.

What they liked was the ease with which a few simple additions could take their outfit from the gym to the office and out for the evening. They also liked the silk screening and yoga figures that made the fabric so distinctive.

Willow called the line eXhale and

previewed it in 2003. It now retails in B.C., Quebec, the Maritimes and parts of the U.S.

There are more than 50 Ontario boutiques carrying eXhale, including Your Finest Things in Tecumseh's Village Grove Plaza.

"My biggest market is baby boomers," Willow says. "The sizes are very generous, and the crossover tops are very flattering. My line really does cater to different body shapes and personalities, and we sell to everyone, from the sophisticated woman to someone who's trendy."

Willow works from a basement studio, but it's getting far too cramped now that she's expanding. "I've been down there for years," she says. "I didn't have a car at the beginning, so I'd leave the basement and go with a trolley bag from shop to shop selling my wares."

She already has celebrity devotees, like Canadian comic Carla Collins and Toronto Sun columnist Valerie Gibson, and the collection grows to meet her clients' changing needs.

There are 25 items and 12 colours in the fall line. "That's a lot," says Willow. "It gets a bit overwhelming sometimes, but when I do things, I do things big." No kidding!

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St. Clair
(Manning at Tecu)

ALL BUSINESS: The nylon/Lycra two-way stretch makes it feel like you're wearing nothing, but the look definitely says this is something that works in the boardroom.