

# Clothing line – like its creator – is a breath of fresh air

By **LYNDA TANEDA**

**T**HERE are some people that can walk into a room and bring it to life. Willow Flare Couto is one of those people.

The second she begins to talk you can't help but feel that she is no ordinary person, and a few minutes into the conversation you know she is special.

Born Beverley Joyce Schulties, in Sydney, Australia, somewhere along the line she realized that her name did not reflect her free spirit, or *joie de vivre*. One day while meditating near a willow she decided to adopt its name. From that moment she became Willow Flare.

At 23, she left her native Australia and moved to Italy. Shortly after, she lived in France, then moved on to London, England, where she found work in a local bar. But determined to make her mark in the world of fashion and art, the Bohemian beauty migrated to Spain and began to pursue her passion for designing clothes. This she did with flair, and she sold her exquisite designs to local shops and boutiques.

At this time she also began designing a unique line of crochet shoes.

"The local women would crochet," she recalls with laughter, "and I would sole them, string them around my neck like a necklace, and sell them in the piazzas alongside local merchants and gypsies."

But her adventurous spirit would not have her rooted in one place for long. Soon after, she went to India where she got more deeply involved with yoga, became a spiritual teacher, and redesigned saris for local women.

Willow stayed in India for about one year, then decided to go back to visit New Zealand. There she lived in a beach-front studio where she could practice yoga on the pristine sand and become creatively inspired by the vastness of the ocean.

Once again Willow's line of fun, functional, and très chic active wear

# WAITING TO *eXhale*



The eXhale line is flexible enough to be worn to the office, to the gym, or even out for the evening.

# Hype

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was under production. With years of practice and expertise behind her, her designs were head and shoulders above the competition.

Although the clothes were initially designed for her personal use, it wasn't long before people wanted to purchase them on a regular basis.

"Everyone liked my clothes," she says. "Customers were reporting that my clothes were not only comfortable, but stylish, and versatile."

Willow attributes the success of her line of clothing to the microfibre that was imported from Italy.

"The combination of lycra and nylon is perfect for moving and stretching," she says, "so people could not only be comfortable in them doing everyday activities, but they could do yoga and other exercises in them. Everyone said my clothes were gorgeous, sensuous, and felt like not wearing clothes at all."

As fate would have it, one day as she was making her way across the street



Two outfits from eXhale's Fall line

to the beach, she met a Portuguese-Canadian gentleman who was visiting New Zealand, and was headed for the beach in the same direction.

"It was love at first sight," she recalls, "and from the moment we met we became inseparable. We spent eight glorious days together, and haven't been apart since."

So at 48, she packed her belongings, left the studio she treasured, and arrived in Toronto in the middle of winter to join her beloved.

**A breath of fresh air.** To fill her days in the new land, she began teaching yoga, and of course, designing clothes. "Once again, people were becoming very interested in my line," she says. "They were amazed that they could wear my clothes from the office to the gym, and even out for the evening!"

**One life well lived.** To say that Willow has had an interesting life is an understatement.

"I have always done yoga," she says, "even before it became popular."

Willow has always felt that she was in union with nature, and has always been a pioneer

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of sorts. Her 'yoga spirit,' or keen sense of awareness, has made her an environmentalist at heart. She was always consciously aware of the fragile balance between nature and progress well before it was the 'fashionable' thing to do.

Willow has been practicing the art of body, mind and spirit connection for many years. She is a self-taught yogi (a skilled practitioner of yoga), an image consultant, and an artist. The qualities and principles of her talents have been incorporated into her line of yoga wear.

**Art in motion.** Willow believes that clothing changes a person's energy. "The right clothing can give a woman a whole new persona," she says. She therefore designs her clothing for the modern, active woman of any age who wishes to be comfortable, yet look elegant.

The eXhale line is manufactured in Canada using a premium fabric that stretches two ways. This allows the fabric to sculpt the body and give the illusion of a slim, svelte figure. The material is light and breathable, soft and luxurious, and is even ideal for the expectant mother.

The clothes do not cling to the body; they flow over bumps and rolls, and flatter every type of shape and form.

Hand-drawn, original artwork that depicts many yoga poses adorn several items. The garment's superior silk screening process ensures long wear and original shape.

In 2003, Willow officially introduced Canada to her fabulous line, and christened it eXhale. It became a hit almost instantly.

The eXhale clothing line is not only popular with the consumer, but with professionals such as Lesley Stuart, choreographer for the Hamilton Tiger-Cats Cheerleaders; with celebrities such as comedian Carla Collins; CTV anchor Christine Bentley and journalist and TV/radio personality Valerie Gibson.

eXhale is sold in fashion boutiques across Canada, and is also available at [www.exhaleyogawear.com](http://www.exhaleyogawear.com). **W**