

**ANGEL ESTRADA**  
CREATING DRAMATIC  
CLOTHES—FIRST  
FOR BARBIE DOLLS,  
NOW FOR REAL, LIVE  
WOMEN—IS THIS  
DESIGNER'S OBSESSION.

**T**he first time Angel Estrada's clothes were taken by his soon-to-be business partner to a potential retail buyer, the young designer stood outside the store yelling, "I won't go in!" He has, in fact, reached his present position—as one of New York's more innovative designers—kicking and screaming every step of the way.

It was just that he was virtually unemployable at anything else. "As long as I can remember, I always loved clothes," he says. "I used to sit in class and draw costumes on the back of my notebook. I'd draw a little doll, and every morning I'd erase her outfit and draw a new one. Then, of course, I moved on to Barbie dolls." His family is Latin, and Barbie dolls were not enthusiastically endorsed for male scions. "My mother's friends would say, 'Why is that boy playing with dolls? He's going to be strange when he grows up.' My mother would say, 'He's

not playing with dolls. Can't you see? He's making them clothes.'"

He progressed from toy models to a life-size one: his sister. The teenage Estradas would go to parties together, and Angel would wear his standard uniform of white shirt, red tie, navy trousers, and penny loafers—sort of Spanish preppy—while Virginia would wear extravagant Angel-made costumes and gowns reminiscent of Balenciaga. Other women would admire the clothes and commission private orders, but Angel still resisted the idea of designing as a fit profession, sometimes begging his promotion-minded sister, "Please don't tell anybody I made that." At 18 he tried studying fine arts at Parsons School of Design. "But this thing inside me for clothes was too much to handle. I'd draw or paint a woman, and it was too fashionable—I'd give her full lips and lots of eyeshadow." He considered switching his field of study, but the

folks at Parsons rather snottily told him, "You think you're a designer already. So go be a designer." His first line was bought, in its entirety, by Bergdorf Goodman, and the store has kept him busy ever since.

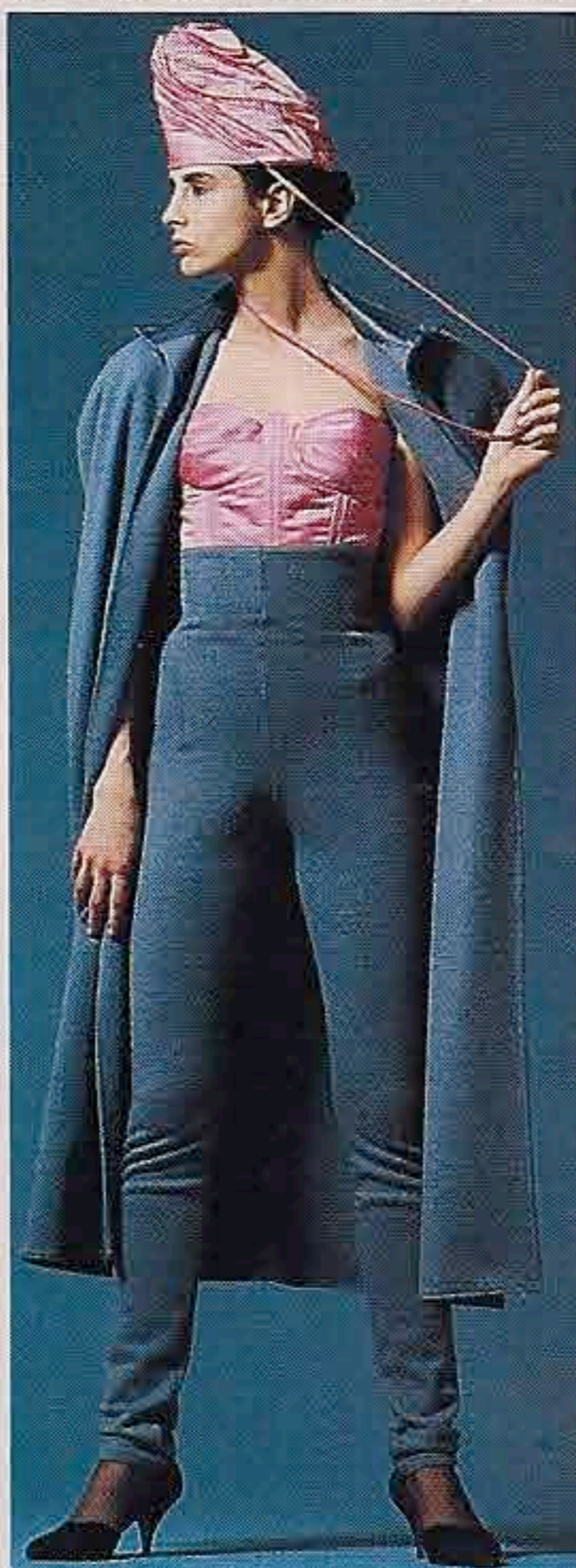
Estrada's clothes are dramatic, almost architectural in their body-consciousness. He wants whatever is covered—hips, breasts, shoulders—still to be insinuated by his clothes. "Women complain about their weight a lot," he says. "They tell me, 'I know I have to be pencil-thin to wear that.' And a lot of times, once they try something on, they say, 'Gee, it's not so bad...'"

The designer himself prefers to be in black—possibly a vestige of an overweight childhood—and his first palette every season is black, with another in ivory or white plus one other color for contrast. "Each season I get my inspiration from a color," he says, and the color suggests the mood of the clothes. "The acid green I did was tough, strong, hard, and the clothes were tailored and tough and pulled. My pink phase was soft, warm to the body, layering tight things on top of other tight things. My gold look is a little flashier, a little dancey."

**T**he clothes are made with a sense of humor. Just about every piece is held together with an oversize luggage zipper, and an otherwise stark column of black may have a single, unexpected, see-through pocket or a lining—visible only to the wearer—of bright chartreuse. "When a woman is facing me," says Estrada, "I like to see her covered in a nice subdued black. Then she'll turn around and her back is open—a little bit of surprise and shock at the same time. I always think of supporting my women—I want to make them happy—so I'll put silk on the inside, color on the inside, just for her. Someone once said to me, 'Your clothes look religious, like Spanish Madonnas.' I think of my clothes as having hard passion inside."

His line, always in all-natural fabrics—linen, silk, cotton, wool—is still sold at Bergdorf Goodman, and retails from \$250 to \$1,000 for a multipiece outfit. The designer's notion of his probable customer? "I have a feeling she's quite conservative on the outside—no makeup and an attaché case. And then, underneath, an Angel Estrada skintight jersey dress. Surprise!"

BY AIMEE LEE BALL;  
STYLIST, SABINE CASSELL



**Angel Estrada, far left, and some of his rich-look, body-conscious designs: pink satin bustier, \$500, left, with grey wool jersey high-waisted pants, \$250, and double-faced cape, \$500. Black silk-wool cutout dress, \$650, below left. Back-zip gold bustier, \$915, below, over black and gold silk dress, \$675. All available at Bergdorf Goodman. Hair, Layla D'Angelo; makeup, Ed Stroud for Bumble & Bumble, NYC.**



GREG KENT

