

Suzanne Rogers – The Philanthropist and Fashionista of Toronto



The magazine cover features a central photograph of Suzanne Rogers, a blonde woman with long hair, wearing a black and white striped suit with large pink roses. She is standing in front of a dark wooden bar with bottles in the background. The floor is a black and white checkered tile.

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ROMANTIC
GIFT IDEAS
for
Valentine's
Day

Paris,
LONDON,
Milan,
New York
fashion
weeks

Hydrafacial
WHERE TO GET IT
DONE

Interior
DESIGN
Hot
TRENDS

SUZANNE
ROGERS
The
PHILANTHROPIST
AND *FASHIONISTA*
of TORONTO

*(Margarita): You are one of the most prominent figures in Canadian fashion and philanthropy, and you even have your own Fashion Institute. Tell us more about how and why you started **The Suzanne Rogers Fashion Institute** at Ryerson University and whether you see it developing in the future.*

(Suzanne): This Institute is new and there is nothing like it in Canada. It's the first fellowship program for fashion. In Canada, universities don't offer a Master's program specifically in Fashion Design. After you graduate from a fashion school, there are limited formal opportunities for advancing creatively and academically, and as a result some of this talent we have in Canada gets lost. **The SRFI** fellowship program invites applications from promising students from third and fourth year and recent graduates. I wanted to use the fellowship as a stepping stone so they receive funds to study abroad, get their Master's degree (Fashion Design) in Milan, Paris, London, receive a paid internship or actively participate in international fashion weeks. It will give them a chance to showcase their work nationally and internationally and generate more awareness and attention. Ryerson University launched the program one year ago. We have three fellows presently and one of them is showing at Toronto Women's Fashion Week while another applied and is attending an international university. They have to get in there themselves but the fellowship program will assist with their tuition for their Master's program. So, it really is trying to push these students to accelerate their career and education.



Suzanne Rogers is wearing Dolce and Gabbana suit, Saint Laurent shoes, Gucci earrings

Will you be doing your famous Suzanne Rogers Presents Gala this year?

To create this event, it takes a full year of planning, travelling, meetings, and lots of time getting to know the designer. It is a partnership and it has to be a good fit for the designer and for my brand that I represent. I've been very fortunate that every event I've done so far has been really successful. We have raised three million dollars to support children charities.

Have you thought which designer you want to bring to Canada next?

There are quite a few! I've been approached by many designers for 'Suzanne Rogers Presents' events and unfortunately, some were declined due to timing and fit. I love fashion and supporting children's charities – it has always been a passion of mine. These high profile events were something that was really never done in Canada before – where a well-known fashion designer would come in, do a show and raise money for children's charities. The attention has been so positive, and my event sells out within four to six weeks, always. It works both ways, as it's a business for the designer as well. They are interested in promoting their product on a bigger stage. So, it has to be a good fit for both of us. I plan on announcing the next designer later this year.



Suzanne Rogers is wearing a dress by Alex Perry, coat by Francesco Scognamiglio, shoes by Mary Katrantzou for Sergio Rossi, earrings by Alan Anderson, bracelet by Rita Tesolin

What other events do you do or like to attend in the city?

There are many events that I like to attend, however, I am very supportive of **The Butterfly Ball for Boost** (Child and Youth Advocacy Centre). Boost works with abused children. I am also supportive of **Covenant House** and just finished chairing a campaign called “*Just Like a Girl You Know*” for victims of sex trafficking in Canada, where we raised \$10 million. In November, I was involved with **Haute Affair** with **Giambattista Valli** along with my co-chair **Vonna Bitove** and the **HBC Foundation** raising funds and awareness for **The Darling Home for Kids** and **The Dotsa Bitove Wellness Academy**. The Darling Home for Kids is a home helping children, who are medically complex experience the fullness of life despite their illnesses. I also remain committed to **SickKids** and their annual ‘**Scrubs in the City**’ event, as an ongoing Committee member. I like to support and bring attention and awareness to charities, that are relatively small and unknown.



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Your daughter Chloe, is she going to follow in your fashion & philanthropy footsteps?

She is a student at Central Saint Martins in London, and has lived there for almost three years now. Her degree will be in Fashion History and Fashion Theory. She loves living there and she loves fashion. I have had some influence on her and she is taking a different approach to fashion which is great. Overall, it is nice when you can share common interests with your daughter.

Is she coming back after she's done school?

I think she'll remain in London and work within the fashion industry there. She's 20 and then I have two little boys at home, who are 10 and 12. They are not into fashion really (*laughs*). As my husband says, two women in fashion that's enough. Chloe has a sense of humor like my husband, who is very funny. They get along great. She is a great mix of both of us, that's for sure.



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And what about your boys? What are their plans for the future?

Well, my son Jack wants to be a CEO of the Blue Jays, and he is quite serious about it. And my son Edward who is 12 doesn't know yet. He loves playing basketball and soccer and he loves playing with his dog.

And what's behind your love story? How did you meet your husband?

We met during high school. Actually, I was dating one of his friends in high school and we met at The Wheat Sheaf Tavern, a popular hangout for UCC boys! We've been married for 11 years now.



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How do you think Canadian fashion can improve and how do we keep outstanding talents here instead of moving to the US or Europe?

It's a question that's been asked quite a bit – '*How do you improve Canadian fashion?*' I think education is first. It would be great if additional universities had Master's programs for fashion design. It would be nice if the government stepped in more, to give grants to students who want to continue their education. Even though Canada is big on the arts and culture, it would be nice if fashion also became a very strong focus for the funding. In countries like Italy, France and England, fashion is part of the culture and receives huge funding from the government. I hope the SRFI will continue to gain recognition in Canada and help our talented designers. I've done a million dollars for the next five years and at the end of a day, that's what's going to make a difference – putting money behind these talented students. To me, it was not so much a donation to Ryerson – it was an investment in Canadian fashion and these students – to see some of these students in the next few years dress some celebrities or increase their brand awareness. People need to step up and promote the fashion designers. I really see it as an investment for the talent we have here like **Dsquared², Greta Constantine**, to name a couple. The talent is there, they just need more recognition and I want to get them a new start.



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If there was only one designer on earth left and you would have to wear his/her designs all the time, who would it be?

That's a tricky question. I love wearing **Alaia** for day wear. For the extravagance, beauty and craftsmanship – **Dolce & Gabbana**.

How has your personal style evolved over the last 10 years?

I love beautiful feminine clothing and that has never changed. I think style evolves as you age. You find new designers who come to the scene. I have never had a “rock and roll” sort of look. I have kept it sophisticated and feminine.

Looking back on your life, would you have done anything differently? And what are your plans for the future?

I suppose we all would have done some things differently, but I am happy with the decisions I have made and my goals for the future are to help out more within the fashion industry.



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Photography by Margarita Menard

Makeup by Arabella Trasca

Hair by Rose Corbo

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