



Legal Advice ALAMODE

An interview with Ashlee Froese

Determined to unite the *Canadian fashion industry*, fashion and branding lawyer **ASHLEE FROESE** educates and empowers entrepreneurs to protect their most sacred asset: their creativity. She's taken up a post as a grassroots leader who's fiercely protective of her clients' ideas, and on a mission to protect, enforce, and commercialize creative ingenuity. *Part legal guru, part branding expert and part industry matchmaker*; Ashlee Froese's endgame is forging connections, and ultimately, elevating the Canadian fashion biz to its rightful place on the world stage.

By Anna Cipollone

Photographer Lily & Lilac
Makeup & Hair Artist Aniko Tar

A childhood obsession with the TV drama *L.A. Law* was the spark that first ignited Ashlee Froese's interest in pursuing law. "Ever since I was 8, I had a very clear vision of what I wanted to do," she explains. Growing up in a household where having a love for what you do was encouraged, Froese credits her parents as her biggest source of inspiration. "Watching the passion they had, and how much they really gave of themselves, to a career path that mattered to them," she says, "that was really instrumental for me."

While in her second year studying international politics at the University of Toronto, Froese began working at a boutique law firm specializing in anti-counterfeiting. She soon realized her skills could best serve start-ups and designers, creating a hybrid practice rooted in both branding and law. "I saw that there was a need for specialization in the fashion industry," says Froese. "I've been able to carve out a career path that wasn't there, in a very traditional profession."

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Froese's commitment to the industry is palpable, and evident in her varied roles. "I position myself as a concierge to the fashion industry," says Froese, who's keen to make connections and introductions. "As much as it takes a village to raise a child," she says, "it takes a village to create a business as well."

Between her many roles – as co-chair of Fashion Group International; advising with the Ryerson Fashion Zone; mentoring with the Toronto Fashion Incubator and the Canadian Arts and Fashion Awards; blogging for her website *CanadaFashionLaw.com*; and as Partner at Fogler, Rubinoff LLP – Froese is busy, but certainly never bored. And it helps when work doesn't feel like a compromise. "This past Tuesday I had a full day at the office followed by a speaking engagement and then a client dinner," explains Froese, "I didn't get home until 10 at night, but I love what I do, so it wasn't really a struggle for me." Even when off-duty, Froese learns as much as she can about the mind-set of successful entrepreneurs to better serve her clients. "I've been reading these biographies about successful entrepreneurs in the fashion and consumer products industries and just drinking them up," she says enthusiastically, "I think this is part of the passion I have for what I do."

Froese admits finding balance is tough, but she fits in an 8km walk to and from the office every day, and recently joined Elle Fitness. So how does she keep herself on track? "I use my calendar to schedule in fitness," she laughs, "because if it's not in my schedule, I'm not going to get to it."

Providing expertise to an underrepresented industry is something Froese finds gratifying: "I've been practicing for 10 years, and when I started out there wasn't really a 'fashion law' practice area in Canada," she says. "It's

very rewarding to me, and humbling to be honest, that the fashion industry recognizes and values what I'm doing." Pausing a moment, she continues: "And it's not something I sought out to do – it just worked for me."

Q&A WITH ASHLEE FROESE

What do you love about fashion? It's an opportunity to represent who you are in a non-verbal way. There's a lot to be said for first impressions and the clothing that you wear is an extension of your personality. You can be as creative as you want to be. I'm very much into individuality and it's a great expression of that.

What's the most satisfying part of your job? It takes a lot to be an entrepreneur, especially in the fashion industry in Canada. And if I can help clients protect themselves in the best way possible, so that they can be the most successful business-people they can be, I find that really gratifying.

Why should we celebrate Canadian fashion? Canada has so much creativity that is uncelebrated and it starts with the Canadian consumer. There's so much influence of international brands here that it's on us to celebrate our own. One of the things that's frustrating is you find that Canadians don't celebrate Canadian talent until they've hit it somewhere else. Our designers deserve better.

What's your best business advice? Treat yourself like a business. It sounds obvious but if you're more slanted towards the creative, you may not think about business nuances. If you don't have expertise in certain areas, find the expert that does. Knowing your strengths and knowing your weaknesses is equally important.

What's the key to success? If you're able to marry your job with your passion, you're never really going to work. What I've always realized, and I tell this to law students, is you need to pick a career that's going to fit in with your life. You don't fit your life into your career because you'll never be happy. You have 40 or 50 years to work, and you're not going to be satisfied if you feel like you're giving up your life for your career.

Ashlee Froese's top picks

FAVOURITE CANADIAN DESIGNERS:

Christopher Paunil, Lucian Matis, Greta Constantine, Smythe, Bojana Sentaler

FAVOURITE UP-AND-COMING CANADIAN BRAND:

Piper & Skye luxury handbags, Oak & River men's customs suits

FAVOURITE APPS:

Duolingo, Associated Press News, 30-day fitness challenge

BOOKS SHE'S READING:

Unlabel: Selling You Without Selling Out by Marc Ecko and Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson