



SUGAR AND SPICE Above: Frothy gowns in confectionary colors are just some of the eye candy offered at Nashville vintage shop Venus & Mars. Right: Owners Karen Elson and Amy Patterson.

Fashion Roadtrip!

Found: Three distinctive boutiques worth a tank-of-gas splurge, including supermodel Karen Elson's vampy vintage shop in Nashville

| By Amy Flurry |

There comes a certain wilting moment when the appeal of a "staycation" loses all charm. This summer, relief arrives in the form of several sartorially inspired weekend road trips. Three one-of-a-kind boutiques have redrawn the fashion map, bringing high style to unexpected places.

Burlesque Meets Boho

Not everything in Nashville is honky-tonk and juke joints. In this country music capital of blue jeans and rhinestones, **Venus & Mars**, a showroom of vintage clothing, channels a more romantic era with gamine bias-cut slips, tulle overlays and antique lace frocks. Housed in an early 20th-century stone-and-clapboard cottage across the street from Belmont University, the boutique transports with its bordello-inspired décor of velvet settees, Art Deco lamps and partitioned dressing nooks. Wardrobe stylist **Amy Patterson** took a chance on opening V&M in 2000, giving locals an option of well-curated, vintage pieces at affordable prices. The boutique doubled its original size with a new location that opened last October, the product of a partnership with one of Patterson's most loyal—and famous—customers, the flame-haired British supermodel **Karen Elson**. (Elson moved to Nashville with rock star husband Jack White of The White Stripes.) "Karen and I have a common appreciation for the craftsmanship of these old garments and the story they each tell," says Patterson. Flush with pieces dating from the Edwardian era to the early 1980s, V&M's inventory abides by the owner's penchant for flapper fashion with subtle burlesque undertones. "There is nothing mad about wearing a 1940s cotton slip as a summer day dress," says Patterson. For the men, a downstairs room replete with fitted jackets and snappy, second-hand bowties is akin to browsing through the MGM costume department during Hollywood's Golden Age. A private salon upstairs for designer labels (Oscar de la Renta, Valentino, Chloé, Dior) and special finds bears witness to Elson's peripatetic lifestyle and treasure-divining abilities. "She scours the globe and brings the best back to Nashville," says Patterson. *Venus & Mars, 2009 Belmont Blvd., Nashville, Tennessee, 615.915.4846, venusandmarsvintage.com.*



When in Nashville

STAY: The Hermitage Hotel. "Having a drink in the hotel's Oak Bar is a must." (231 6th Ave. N, 702.951.5763)

PLAY: "Hillsboro Village is within walking distance of our shop," says Patterson. "It is lined with small shops, cafes and restaurants and is a great place for an afternoon glass of white wine."

EAT: Gnocchi of the day at Mirror Restaurant. (2317 12th Ave., S, 615.383.8330)



CHIC BOUTIQUE
A refined decor, including de Gournay hand-painted wallpapers and plush velvet lounge chairs, matches the artfully curated high fashions.



The Label Maker

A four-hour drive to Charlotte, North Carolina, will land you both in NASCAR country and on the doorstep of fashion's current retail heartthrob, **Capitol** boutique. (It's been lauded in *WWD*, *Town & Country* and the *New York Times T Magazine*.) When owner **Laura Vinroot Poole** expanded and relocated her shop to a sparkling, 6,000-square-foot space near Morrison Place in February, chic Charlotteans and a parade of "it" designers, including Erin Fetherston and Rodarte sisters Kate and Laura Mulleavy, turned out for the highly publicized event. The airy boutique teems with exquisite collections, including handmade Sabbia Rosa lingerie from Paris, a Lanvin bridal salon and rare Gem Palace jewelry—as well as hot ticket lines like Balenciaga, Dries Van Noten and Balmain. The key to Capitol's success, Poole confides, is a simple truism. "We know our clients and their lifestyles pretty intimately," she says. "Trends must conform to their lifestyles, rather than the other way around." The décor, a polished, minimalist interior, is appointed with mid-century French and American antiques by Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand and Edward Wormley. But the boutique's most arresting feature is the soaring vegetal wall in the courtyard, by the Parisian botanist Patrick Blanc. "My husband and I met Patrick in India and he jumped at the chance to do a project in the South," says Poole, who recently hosted a cocktail party in the 750-square-foot courtyard for Isaac Mizrahi complete with homegrown peonies, homemade cheese straws and sweet tea cocktails. *Capitol*, 4010 Sharon Road, Charlotte, North Carolina, 704.366.0388.

When in Charlotte

STAY: The Duke Mansion in Myers Park. (400 Hermitage Rd., 704.714.4400)

PLAY: Catch a production by Opera Carolina or go to a NASCAR race.

EAT: Order "1/4 white" from Price's Chicken Coop (1614 Camden Road, 704.333.9866) or try the "Murgh Tikka Masala" at Indian cuisine scene Copper. (311 East Blvd., 704.333.0063)

PHOTOS OF CAPITOL BOUTIQUE BY BREE WILLIAMS COURTESY OF CAPITOL. PHOTO OF BILLY REID STORE BY ABRAHAM ROWE COURTESY OF BILLY REID.



NATIVE SON Billy Reid's flagship boutique in Florence, Alabama, offers crisp, impeccably tailored classics and a heaping helping of Southern hospitality.

Hats Off to Homespun

The entrance to **Billy Reid**'s eponymous store in Florence, Alabama, is through a grand parlor lined with painted family portraits. Heirloom bourbon decanters stand at the ready for a dose of Southern hospitality, while the timeworn manor, a former residence of Confederate Colonel Pickett, showcases the designer's label in old haberdasher-style splendor. Cotton shirts, wrinkled khaki pants, slip-on Roper boots and ties are casually tossed on wooden-peg coat racks. Reid, who grew up in Louisiana, burst onto the fashion scene in New York in the late '90s, and went on to win the CFDA Perry Ellis Award for Menswear in 2001. But after the dark months that followed 9/11, the designer decided to reseed his brand in his wife's Alabama hometown, launching a complementary women's collection last year, and expanding into Charleston, Charlotte, Dallas, Houston and Nashville. This past September saw Reid's re-entry into New York with his Bond Street shop that was built entirely of reclaimed materials like salvaged pine floorboards from a cotton gin. "We trucked most of it from Alabama and decided to do much of the work ourselves," says Reid. Nevertheless, nothing beats the elegantly threadbare charms of Reid's original outpost in its sleepy Southern hamlet. *Billy Reid*, 438 N. Seminary Street, Florence, Alabama, 256.767.4692, billyreid.com. **A**

When in Florence

STAY: The Limestone House. (601 N. Wood Ave., 256.765.0365)

PLAY: "A stroll down Court Street, the oldest part of town, is a great way to get a strong sense of the town's rich history."

EAT: Bunyan's BBQ (901 West College St., 256.766.3522). "Their pork is slow cooked to perfection and comes with a spicy hot coleslaw like nothing you've ever tried."