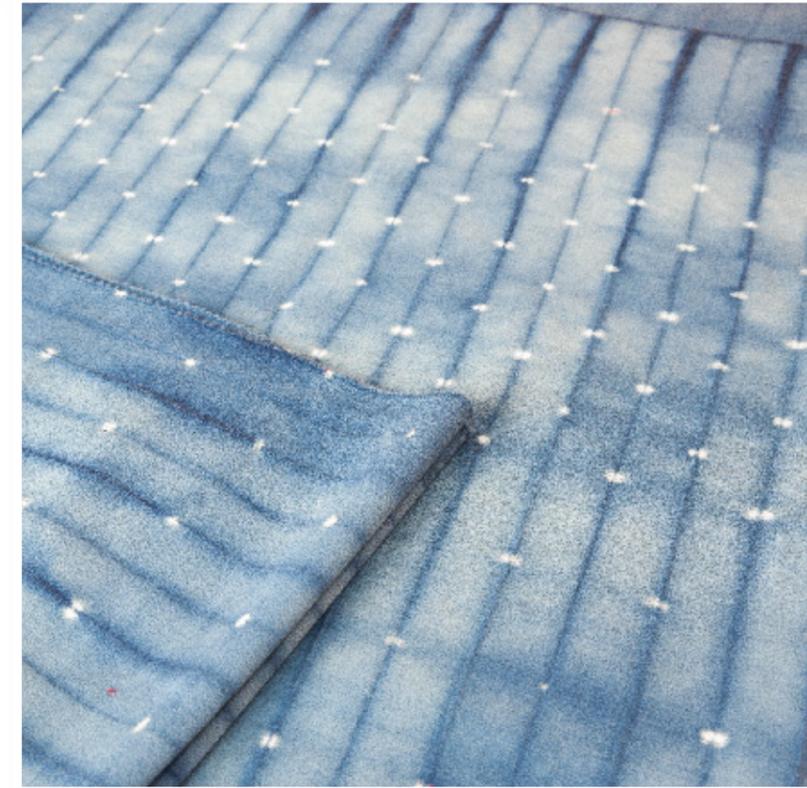


# batik & beyond

*Marie Labarelle's approach to fashion blends sustainability with batik in a unique approach to dressing women; draping and pleating natural fabrics to create a thoroughly modern silhouette*



Batik on silk with exclusive motifs by Marie Labarelle. F/W 2015-2016 collection. Handmade at Batik Winotosastro, Indonesia

Opposite: Wool crepe cloth handwoven in France, and hand dyed in Indonesia using shibori with indigo and mangrove bark dyes. Created for the Lava Coat. F/W 2015-2016 collection

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANNE LAURE CAVILLER

**THE CHARM OF MARIE LABARELLE'S fashion collections attracts customers looking for authenticity, and anyone wishing to escape the uniformity of mass-produced garments.** A graduate architect turned fashion designer, Labarelle approaches clothing like a vacant space waiting to be inhabited, a safe haven where the body can move freely and simply be. The French designer's fascination is fuelled

by her love of rare fabrics, a passion she pursues when travelling in Asia and Europe. Each of her garments is carefully cut from a single piece of cloth, bringing a sense of exquisite slowness and meditative quality to her clothing. Labarelle is also strongly committed to producing sustainable and durable textiles, narrowing the focus of her brand by working exclusively with high quality woven textiles.

Labarelle grew up in the Alsace region and earned a Master's Degree in architecture in Strasbourg. 'My studies paved the way for an artistic career. I learned to develop creative projects and to keep an open mind; it led me straight to fashion design.' As a young student, she could not find a dress that truly suited her so she began to design for herself. 'I was a fourth-year student full of confidence when I bought



my first sewing machine to make my own clothes. In architecture we deal with any kind of material – there's literally no limit – so working with fabric did not seem so odd. My training had prepared me for the design and craft sectors.' At the time, she was studying in Rotterdam and making frequent trips to Antwerp, the city of fashion that saw the rise of the Antwerp Six – the avant-garde fashion collective founded by designers such as

there,' she says. 'I'm fundamentally self-taught and could never followed any pre-existing clothes patterns. I'd rather develop my own ideas. When I designed my first dress in 2003 I broke all the rules by moving the seams toward the front and back of the piece. It was all very instinctive.' In 2005, she launched her own label, gradually expanding her small independent business whilst remaining true to her own vision. 'I learned to work with space and

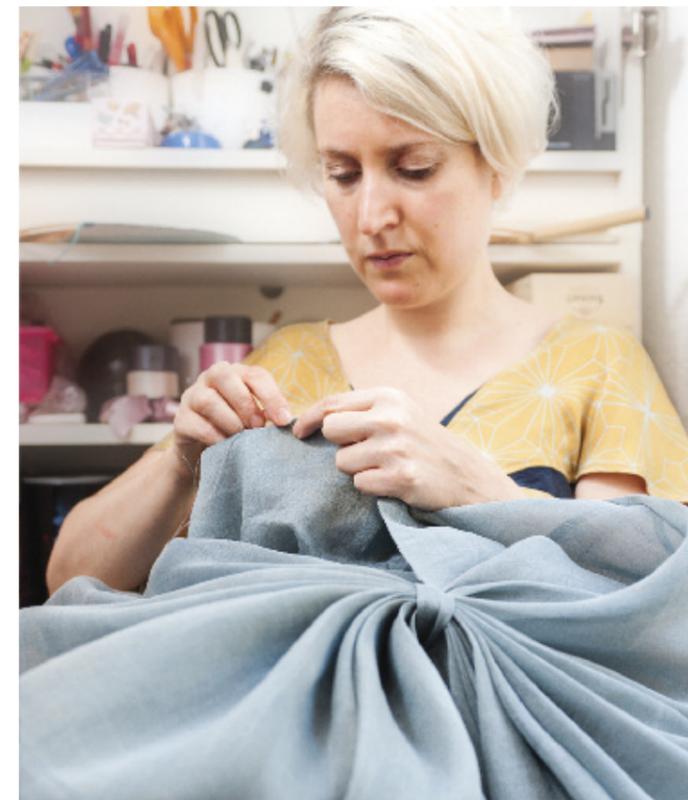
and high-end fabrics, gradually refining her 'textile consciousness'. Then came a turning point. Whilst researching Indonesian textiles, she was struck by the sheer beauty of batik artistry. 'Whilst traveling in Indonesia I came to understand that textiles could just be textiles, without being garments. I was touched by the richness of this traditional cultural heritage and I could feel how ancient craftsmanship was deeply rooted

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Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester and Dirk Bikkembergs. 'When I visited the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Antwerp, I came to understand they approached fashion design like we approached architecture.' This was followed by a stint working at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris in 2001, and the next year she sold her first creations, embracing the fast pace of the fashion industry by promoting her collections at various fashion trade shows. 'My first pieces may have not been perfect, but all my basic essentials were already

volumes; these are my basics. I don't believe the body should feel trapped in clothes; it needs room. I work on my silhouette like an architect, looking at it in a 360-degree way. Then I imagine how movement would bring life to the whole structure. I'm also driven by the fact that I was never fully satisfied with the clothes I saw in retail stores, so in the end I had to develop my personal aesthetic.' Instead of sketching her ideas, she works out her pattern by draping an entire piece of cloth on a dummy, creating volume through pleats. Over time, she has turned to rare

in Indonesian lifestyle. Exploring batik art helped me to be more focused on essentials, which was quite challenging too. I designed a collection using single pieces of fabric the size of sarongs, creating little or no fabric waste. It was a brand new approach to design that brought many technical difficulties. I didn't think I would do it again but the zero-waste goal has become part of my work philosophy. I explore volumes and shapes differently, still playing intuitively with seam placements. It's an evolving and maturing process. Now, all my patterns must fit



Right: Marie Labarelle in her studio in Paris, sewing the Sun Jacket for the F/W 2015-2016 collection. The silk cloth was handwoven in Korea and hand dyed in Nimes, France with Marjory Salles dyes, indigo and false saffron

Below: A batik design on silk in progress at Batik Winotosastro. The motif – *Homme Oiseau* – was designed by Marie Labarelle

Opposite: Various stages of the shibori process. Wool crepe cloth is pleated and stitched and rested in cold water prior to dyeing. It is then placed repeatedly into the indigo dye bath, and checked by hand before being hung up to dry





Examples of Marie Labarelle's batik designs on silk for the F/W 2015-2016 collection. Handmade at Batik Winotosastro, Indonesia

within a single piece of fabric. Batik sarongs helped me to understand fabric was a precious commodity and had to be treated with respect. The creative process begins with the fabric. I feel its weight then I watch how it drapes, folds and pleats. Natural fibre fabrics are at the core of my work'

of waxing and dyeing must be repeated several times to achieve the elaborate and colourful designs. Labarelle has developed a long-term partnership with the Batik Winotosastro workshop and the manager Bu Hani had Labarelle's exclusive contemporary designs made into copper

scouring traditional markets for hand processed textiles. I found a roll of mud silk fabric – a quite rare and very inspirational piece.' The use of natural dyes echoes her recent eco-friendly, no-waste approach to designing and sourcing, and mirrors

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The designer divides her time between designing her collections and researching fine and rare textiles in Asia. She travels to Yogyakarta in Indonesia twice a year, where she produces her colourful batik collections. A skilled craftsman draws her exclusive motifs on a cotton or silk cloth, using a pencil. The wax is applied on the pattern with a copper stamp (a batik cap) or it's hand-drawn with the small copper cup called a 'canting'. The cloth is dipped in a first dye bath, then the wax is scraped or boiled off in a large caldron. The process

stamps. 'I've created an infinite number of motifs and colour combinations. Batik is handmade so the result is never the same twice. By creating batik sarongs I can make unique and exclusive pieces in every collection,' she explains. The designer recently learned to use vegetable dyes for the first time, creating a new technical challenge as batik dyeing requires cold-water dyes to prevent the wax from melting. 'Natural dyes make much more vibrant colours. I clearly saw that when I was travelling in Korea and

her long maturing idea of the landscape woman: 'Wearing naturally dyed clothes is like carrying a tiny piece of earth with you, it's a way to interact with the world.' ● Anne Laure Camilleri

[www.marie-labarelle.com](http://www.marie-labarelle.com)

You can find Marie Labarelle's designs at La Ruche Concept Store, 34 rue des Petites Écuries, 75010 Paris, France



PHOTOGRAPHY: ANNE LAURE CAMILLERI



1. The Meharee dress made from silk cloth handwoven in Indonesia and dyed using batik with natural indigo and maclura tinctoria dyes
2. Marie Labarelle drapes fabric on a mannequin in her Paris studio
3. Samples of indigo-dyed cloth are recorded in a notebook
4. The Dune coat is made from silk cloth handwoven in Korea with natural indigo and false saffron dyes
5. Batik on silk in progress at Batik Winotosastro, Indonesia. The exclusive motif was designed by Marie Labarelle

