

Steering Sirapop

the two recent grads behind Sirapop on spearheading anti-fashion fashion without entirely disrupting industry norms



by Alex Harrell
photography courtesy of Sirapop

Sirapop (“Gabby”) Dechraksa and Sofia Ortega met at Parson School of Design’s orientation in 2013. The two became close that year; both enrolled in ESL classes as a requirement for international students, despite divergent interests. Ortega majored in strategic design and management while Dechraksa studied fashion design. The two kept in touch, but saw each other less often as their collegiate careers unfolded.

Dechraksa showed Ortega his thesis collection, which she described as disruptive and defining — what a real *designer* designer would, well, design. She asked him to lunch as a ploy to convince him to partner and start a business with her — something he had previously shrugged off. The two students, originally from Colombia and Thailand, were waiting for their Optional Practical Training (OPTs) to arrive, thus forcing the two to stay in the States that summer. It was perfect timing. Dechraksa agreed, under one condition: The brand had to be his Thai name. And that’s when Sirapop (the company, that is) was born.

How did you become interested in fashion?

Sofia Otiga: I spent a lot of time with my mom when I was a little girl. She used to work in finance and wore the coolest suits for her meetings. Her face would change every time she put on a suit. Later, I understood this was her armor! She would leave the house in such a graceful and elegant way; I started analyzing the garments she decided to buy.

Gabby Dechraksa: I painted a lot when I was young. After school, I would go to art classes. I didn’t like sports; painting was so much easier for me. I was determined to express myself at all times. I would look at my mom’s magazines, but the clothes were so different than what I saw at the mall. That’s when I decided to make my own wardrobe. I would go to my mom’s tailor and ask her to make a chef-inspired shirt, a Michael Jackson jacket and so on. It was how I expressed myself best.

What inspired you to create the label?

CD: We wanted to bring back the classic essence of fashion. During our college years, we saw an enormous shift in how major brands were transforming their silhouettes and the brand’s identity and taking the collections into a new direction. Social media became the intermediate between the industry and professionals who had a strong influence on people. So it makes so much sense why brands wanted these professionals to “collaborate” with them. The identity of a brand shifted from the visuals of the actual designs to how and by whom the product was presented.

SO: I think this transformation made it easier for brands to quantify and measure the success behind a collection. As students, we saw how this had an effect on the collections and designs brands presented. Sirapop was our response to this inevitable change. As a brand, we understand that fashion co-exists within the digital world. Strategies must change for labels to adapt and prosper. Our goal is to design unfiltered fashion. Fashion that reminds you of *why* we dress up in the first place.

Where are you located? How big is your space? How large is your team?

SO: Right now, we’re located between Bangkok, Mexico City and New York City. Our office is in Bangkok, but our brand is based in NYC. Our team consists of an art director, suppliers and manufacturers that help us produce our pieces. We consider everyone involved in our creative, design and technical process part of our team. We outsource this talent.

I see that you proudly use fur. With the increasing decline of luxury brands using fur, is this something that you still feel strongly about? At what point do you believe that separating artistic vision from ethical responsibility is appropriate?

CD: Our vision should never compromise our ethical responsibility. My job as a designer is to design and create clothes that people will enjoy and cherish. But as a person who is passionate about design, my job is to always be transparent toward what I love the most. Fur became such an important topic of discussion because of mass consumption. Consumers wanted more quantity for a less expensive price, and it’s because of this demand that society started implementing unethical practices. The brands that stopped using fur made the decision that was best for their business; I would have done the same. But as an emerging designer, I have the freedom to build a brand from scratch, where our client can appreciate the quality and transparency behind our brand as a business. Our brand is an extension of who Sofia and I are. Not only as creatives, but as individuals.

What are the eco-friendly and ethical practices that are in the collections?

CD: All of the materials we use are traceable. We make sure that the talent that executes our designs not only work under good conditions but are comfortable within the team they work with. The result of our team living under such a positive work environment can be seen in the quality of our products.

"Our goal is to design unfiltered fashion; fashion that reminds you of *why* we dress up in the first place."

Sofia Ortiga

Walk me through your supply chain.

CD: So the first step of our supply chain is designing the product. After choosing the final designs, we send off our designs to our freelance production team in NYC to create samples for us. In the meantime, we source fabric through agents. Normally, we use fabrics that can be obtained by suppliers so we can manage production. Then, we show our samples to buyers, editors and clients who could be interested in buying the product. Normally, after the samples are done, we create a creative strategy where the product becomes the most important asset of the entire process.

Tell me about "anti-fashion" and what that means to you.

SO: Anti-fashion means not following society's rules. In our case, Sirapop wants to be passionate about the designs we produce, and as a brand, we believe that this passion is the only way of creating good work. So for us, to make a good design, we cannot follow the industry standards. That is why we use anti-fashion as an adjective.

What are the expected standards of the fashion industry that you are pushing past, and how are you doing so?

SO: We are pushing the expected standards of the industry by offering a new type of experience through luxury fashion. Sirapop wants to become a leader in the industry, where creatives can feel free to be authentic to who they are as an artist. Our goal is to create a brand that sets an example to younger designers that may feel lost in an over-saturated world of information and perception.

Tell me about the geopolitical restrictions you've faced since graduating from Parsons.

CD: After graduating from Parsons, Sofia and I stayed in NYC for one more year. After that, Sofia went back to Colombia, I to Thailand. It was challenging for us to work with different time zones, as we are the only two people working full-time for Sirapop. Our first collection was made in NYC, so the idea was to produce and distribute our product from there. But after leaving the country, we had to accommodate to our conditions and find new resources. By *not* producing in NYC, we are able to offer a better price for U.S. products. This has been the most unexpected outcome of our journey. By creating all our samples in NYC, we set a standard for the quality of production of the collection.

Where do you see Sirapop in the next few years?

SO: We want Sirapop to be seen as an innovative and exciting brand within the fashion industry. Our goal is for the ideas behind the design process become an experience for our customer, so the product is valued and understood for what it is and not who is wearing it. Hopefully, this will start a conversation among our peers and help create a new market space for designers.

CD: I want to show people that if you want to work in fashion, you only need the passion. You don't need to fit or have a worthy lifestyle to be seen. I want people to be seen for their talent and to appreciate the process behind it. By process, I mean the number of people, time, support and sacrifice that it takes for one item to be produced. Sirapop doesn't represent me, but a larger group of people.

