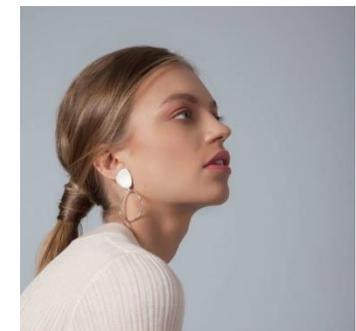


## The Irish Are Coming: Showcase Set for May

Winners of a fashion contest in Ireland will be flown to NYC to meet buyers, editors and business leaders.

By [David Moin](#) on March 16, 2018



There's an issue with Irish fashion designers — their stories are largely untold.

“Designers across the island of Ireland are producing world-class fashion, yet few people outside the country could name an Irish designer,” said Margaret Molloy, a native of Offaly in rural Ireland, who serves as global chief marketing officer of the Siegel+Gale branding firm and two years ago founded WearingIrish, a platform championing Irish designers.

“There is new and exciting product in Ireland but nobody knows it’s there,” said Don O’Neill, creative director of the Theia fashion brand, who was born in Ballyheigue, a small village in Ireland.

On Friday – the day before St. Patrick’s Day – Molloy and O’Neill were among those participating in a Bank of Ireland panel discussion that focused on the bank’s Startlab incubator. But it was also where Molloy announced the 10 Irish designers who won the “WearingIrish NYC 2018” fashion contest, an event building upon two years of social media campaigns by Molloy and WearingIrish.

It’s a big break for the winners. They’ll be flown to New York City where they’ll be front and center at the WearingIrish NYC Showcase, set for May 15-17 at the Startlab offices at Bank of Ireland, [140 East 45th Street](#).

“They will be getting access to the New York market,” said Molloy. The showcase, kind of a mini trade show, will bring in buyers, editors, fashion and business leaders to discover the Irish talent. Details are listed on [wearingirish.com](#).



Margaret Molloy champions designers from Ireland.

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For the contest, WearingIrish received 172 applicants and the 10 winners were chosen by a panel of 25 jurors which included merchants, creative directors, executives, investors, editors and influencers from Bloomingdale’s, The Accessories Council, Victoria’s Secret, Stella & Dot, Popsugar, Theia, Keds, Kate Spade, Harvard University and Gilt Group. There were also two fashion directors from Bloomingdale’s: Heather Shimokawa, vice president, women’s; and Justin Berkowitz, men’s, on the jury. In an age when retailers are all scrambling for fashion exclusives, this could get them the jump on Irish collections come May.

“This is looking very exciting,” said Bloomingdale’s vice chairman Frank Doroff, who attended the Bank of Ireland event Friday. “If Margaret Molloy comes to your office to talk, she can inspire you to do anything.”

“Making it in America is about relationships,” said O’Neill. “For any entrepreneur to be successful, you need to have relationships.”

Tweeds and knitwear are iconic to Irish design, though as Molloy explained the ten winning designers, collectively speaking, draw a balance between giving “a nod” to Ireland’s heritage while maintaining a contemporary appeal.

“My hope is that WearingIrish inspires the marketer and storyteller in all of us,” said Molloy. “Promoting Irish fashion and accessories designers is a tangible way to demonstrate Ireland’s creativity and, when we promote Ireland as a nation of makers, every designer, every Irish business and every Irish person is a winner.”

The 10 designers lines are:

- \* Aine knitwear, created on the Wild Atlantic Way with color, texture, natural fabrics and simple shapes.
- \* Alison Conneely, which utilizes Donegal tweed and Connemara lace blending Irish heritage and modern design.
- \* Blaithe Ennis, a jewelry designer whose innovative techniques and craftsmanship utilize fine nylon braiding as the primary aesthetic, combined with robust metals and crystal.
- \* De Bruir, which creates modern-classic leather goods combining wax cotton, leather and simple, pared-back construction techniques.
- \* Inner Island, a line of sophisticated, handcrafted modern jewelry.
- \* Jennifer Rothwell, who is renowned in Ireland for striking colorful prints and innovative design.
- \* Natalie B. Coleman, whose women’s collections incorporate opulent fabrics, appliqués, whimsical hand-beaded and handpainted surface decoration.
- \* Sands and Hall, which reinvents capes with contemporary, wearable, fashion-forward styles.
- \* The Tweed Project, which combines Irish fabrics with modern tailoring.
- \* Triona, which offers outerwear, knitwear and tailoring for a strong feminine look.