



# Jean therapy

Shannon Denny heads to cutting-edge North London to meet one fashionista who's got a leg up on the competition

Levi Strauss was in the American Wild West when he had the bright idea to stitch up durable pairs of trousers from fabric he'd originally intended to use in making tents. Such was the success of his invention that today it's not at all uncommon for the average wardrobe to possess jean inventories running into the double digits. Very few pairs, however, will have been manufactured in the US, and fewer still can claim Britain as their birthplace.

But just when it seemed that the Far East had seized a monopoly on the production of denim strides, along came Laundry Maid. The label is the invention of Barbara Graham, a fashion designer who lives and works in Crouch End. While the garments are sewn in Leicester, it is within her North London studio that all the label's unique designs unfold.

The premium denim brand launched only in 2008, but it borrows from a much older heritage. "I've always as a designer been quite inspired by my grandmother," explains Barbara. "She was in service and basically worked her way up from this humble position as a laundry maid to ladies' maid, which was much grander."

With meticulous cuts and extra-fine finishes, Barbara's creations also pay homage to the traditions and expertise of Saville Row. "With some of the tailoring details, it puts a smarter edge on traditional five-pocket jeans. Plus, I wanted it to resonate with that idea of Britishness and British tailoring."

She says "effortless comfort" is the goal behind the Laundry Maid aesthetic, and she achieves this through an unusual construction technique that incorporates a signature back panel designed to subtly

shape the rear. The innovation plays a role in each and every pair. "I use it to neaten up baggier fits, and to absolutely super-mould skinny fits onto the body." The result enhances rather than hides the natural curves of the human silhouette.

While the third Laundry Maid collection will debut in September, Barbara also keeps busy as a lecturer in fashion at City and Islington College where she shares experience gained from years working as a designer for a host of fashion companies. "The focus of the college is very much to serve the local community, which I really, really like."

So although her North London stomping ground hasn't got the long denim legacy of the American West nor the manufacturing vigour of the Far East, she finds the locale is perfect for her line of work. "I think there are lots of people who work for themselves around the Crouch End area," she says. "You'll never sit in a café by yourself. It tends to be a quite progressive area; people are quite entrepreneurial I think." And with that she returns to the studio, fearlessly applying visionary modifications to the most enduring garment of the modern world.

Laundry Maid ([WWW.LAUNDRYMAIDJEANS.CO.UK](http://WWW.LAUNDRYMAIDJEANS.CO.UK)) is available at Potassium (2 Seymour Place, W1H 7NA; 020 7723 7800)