

PERSONAL STYLE

# For Designer Nara Paz - Success Is In the Details

6 MIN

BY **CHERYL FENTON** | DECEMBER 4, 2019 READ





Nara Paz

There's something about the color red.

Just a glimpse of the shade and you feel its power and determination. It symbolizes all things passionate and fiery.

So, it's only natural that Nara Paz would have this color as her go-to showstopper pop. The Brazilian-born, Boston-based fashion designer is lighting the design scene on fire.

She has been referred to as the Oscar de la Renta of Boston for her unusual textiles, luxurious fabrics, and distinctively different details (animal-textured mohair and faux fur, we're looking at you).

"You will see me in black all the time," she says of her own personal, everyday dress. "But if I want to put the fashion designer out there, you will probably see me in a very unexpected hairstyle and wearing something red."

"It's a very strong color, very powerful and feminine. Red is very difficult to wear, so when you wear it right, you make a statement," she continues, noting she always at least does her nails in red. "When I wear red I feel confident and in charge."

## **Fashion Was Always Her Thing**





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COURTESY OF NARA PAZ FAMILY

Nara Paz as a child and her family in Brazil

You might say red is where it all began for Nara Lúcia Paz-Gain, who grew up one of four sisters in a small town of Quaraí, in the most southern part of Brazil, bordering Uruguay. “We were very poor, so I used to make my clothing and my dolls’ clothing. I learned how to sew at very young age with my grandmother, who had an old, foot-driven Singer sewing machine.” Her first dress: a red and white polka dot pinafore, made when she was seven years old.

“My stepmother and dad used to visit us when I was a child. In my memories, I have the image of the powerful woman who captured my dad’s heart. She was tall, elegant, independent, with a Chanel hairstyle, long red nails and red lips,” she remembers. “That is how my fascination for the color red started. I wanted to do more dresses in red in the future.”

Paz would do so, but in time. Instead, she first became a successful graphic designer while studying industrial design. “I was doing graphics and branding for a successful swimming wear clothing brand in Florianópolis [in Brazil], and suddenly, I found myself designing T-shirts, clothing embellishments, creating labels, closures,” she says. “It came naturally for me. As a designer, it’s very helpful know all the parts and tools of the industry.”

## Starting Over

Paz’s transition to fashion was an easy path that took her overseas.

In 2002, she met her soon-to-be husband Dennis Gain on a trip to New Zealand, his native country. “He was living in Boston, so he brought me here, and I fell in love with the city and the snow,” she laughs. “I used to be a beach girl, but life takes over and here I am years after.”

A move to the U.S. came in 2006 when Paz returned to college to study fashion. She managed to complete the four-





year [Fashion Design & Production course at Lasell College](#) in Boston in just two and a half years, graduating summa cum laude in 2009. Soon thereafter, along with Gain, Paz opened [Nara Paz Design Internationale](#), her design house and atelier.

“It was very difficult to start here from zero,” she remembers. “We had to get to know people — good ones, bad ones — and take exhausting trips to New York City and Paris in order to build relationships and trust to run our fashion business.”

That legwork paid off, as Paz was quickly embraced by the crème de la crème of Boston.

“My first piece I designed for my collection was this gorgeous gown that ended up being worn by Gail Huff — a broadcast journalist and wife of former U.S. Senator Scott Brown — at the State Dinner at the White House,” she says. The elaborate gold strapless corseted couture gown boasts a chiffon skirt and was adapted from Paz’s senior collection at Lasell. The dress became a topic of complimentary conversation between Huff and First Lady Michelle Obama.

“I want the woman who wears my clothing to be noticed and admired,” continues Paz. “I want her to feel extremely well-dressed and comfortable, so she can shine without compromise.”

## Finding Success







WILLIAN DOWNEY

Gail Huff, wearing the dress Paz designed for her for a State Dinner at the White House

Today, the core collection in Paz's Atelier boasts over 100 designs, from ready-to-wear to exclusive styles that clients can choose fabrics from the yard if they wish. Think seasonal modern interpretations of classic silhouettes that are decidedly feminine and fearless (and, yes, sometimes red). Avant-garde, signature-tailored coats, double-breasted mini dresses, jacquard coats, and elegant blouses, alongside ultra-refined couture gowns and evening wear.

Paz has several feathers in her stylish cap, including Boston's Best Local Fashion Designer award from the Improper Bostonian and being named Fashion Group International New York finalist of 14th and 15th Rising Star Awards. "I was the only Boston Designer who made it that far," she says of being among names like Wes Gordon and Ally Hilfiger.

High-profile women and celebrities have worn her designs to the Oscars, Grammys and Emmys, including Brazilian-American actress Morena Baccarin, who plays Leslie Thompkins on "Gotham" and Jessica Brody on "Homeland," and Grammy-winning R&B singer Mya.

It was through hard work and determination that Paz gained such status in her atelier. But the end of a runway wasn't the hard stop of her journey.

"Life takes over and sometimes taking your time is fundamental to achieve your dreams. It doesn't matter how long

it takes to get there, as long as you choose to live. My number one rule is to never give up. I tell my daughter this every day.”

## Establishing Balance

Four-year old Sophia-Jean, who Paz calls her “miracle,” truly embodies the spirit of persistence.

In 2014, Paz began to rethink life’s goals. “I didn’t want to go out of this life without having a baby. I wanted to have it all — a family and career — and why not? But it was becoming too late for me,” she recalls.

The couple started grueling IVF cycles, to no avail. “I was in NYC doing my hormone injections in the middle of Times Square.”

After seven cycles and one miscarriage, she had one frozen embryo left. “I told myself I would do one more time. It was the ‘never give up’ kind of thinking,” says Paz.

Gain suggested a work trip to Paris and England, so the couple could focus on their growing business if this last chance didn’t happen.

“While in Paris, I was in a fashion trade show, and I got food poisoning,” she continues. At the hospital, Paz faced a language barrier about her potential pregnancy. “The doctor shouted ‘voila’ and started to jump in celebration. I didn’t understand anything they said, but they kept saying, ‘The baby! The baby!’” Finally she understood the good news. “We heard her heart beat for the first time. It was magical.”

Sophia-Jean was born in April 2015, and Paz switched gears to being a full-time mom. “I decided to have a break to enjoy her, since she would be my only child.” She spent time with relatives in New Zealand and Brazil as she watched her grow.



Back to work since her daughter was two years old, Paz continues designing for Nara Paz Atelier. She has cultivated incredible support of haute couture suppliers from France, Italy and Spain, and shares her time between Boston, New York City, Florianópolis and Auckland, New Zealand.

“I am in the best time of my life right now. I do feel like a warrior sometimes,” she says. “I think most women do these days, with the things we have to do make us stronger.”

And, to celebrate that strength, as Bill Blass once said, “When in doubt, wear red.”



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## Cheryl Fenton

Cheryl Fenton is a Boston-based writer who focuses on beauty, decor, fashion, food and travel. Her bylines have been in publications including InStyle, Glamour, the Boston Globe, Whole Foods, the Improper Bostonian, and Cooking Light.

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