

# Montage

Art, books, diverse creations

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paintings and Prince concerts. Along with panties, camisoles, slips, and rompers, Lola Haze offers one-of-a-kind hand-painted silk pieces produced in collaboration with New York-based artist Charlotte Pinson. To care for all these delicacies, Mehlinger created the Laundry Bag™, a lacy pouch for washing, storage, or travel.

For Mehlinger, each new collection offers the chance to express her deepest sensibilities. “Unexpected juxtapositions are what’s

**Laura Mehlinger with a Colorfield romper, in silk with mesh streamers (left), and a silk-and-mesh veil chemise.**

most interesting to me about design,” she says. “When something’s visually expected, it blends into the background. If you’re designing clothes for that purpose, that’s great. But it’s creating something visually jolting yet also somehow harmonious that truly inspires me.”

In 2009, its second year, Lola Haze expanded into 34 stores, including Victoria’s Secret, in 11 states. (Prices range from \$25 to \$80, for basic items, up to several hundred dollars for silk chemises with complex detailing.) “Lingerie for American women is tricky,” Mehlinger says. “They’re not raised to be comfortable with the idea

## Highbrow Lingerie

*Fashion designer Laura Mehlinger draws on inspirations ranging from Vladimir Nabokov to Prince.*

by SUSAN HODARA

LINGERIE AND LITERATURE don’t come together that often, but when naming her intimates brand, fashion designer Laura Mehlinger ’01 turned to Vladimir Nabokov. Lola Haze™ alludes to *Lolita*, the subject of Mehlinger’s senior honors thesis in English. “Lola” was another of 12-year-old Dolores Haze’s nicknames. “It’s a reference to my admiration for Nabokov,” Mehlinger says, “for the way

he plied his craft in such a playful, seductive, and completely masterful way.”

The same adjectives could describe the way Mehlinger plies her craft. Consider, for example, the Ruffle Teddy from her Wabi Sabi City collection, whose sheer black bodice is hand-painted with tattoo-like ornamentation. Or her Colorfield collection, whose combinations of fuchsias, oranges, and violets were inspired, Mehlinger says, by Morris Louis’s

*Photograph courtesy of Laura Mehlinger*

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## MONTAGE

of display.” Her clientele, she adds, are women who feel empowered and confident, and dress for themselves.

“I always wanted to be a fashion designer,” she says. “As a child, I would spread fabric on the floor, lie on it, trace myself, and cobble together weird little outfits.”

Growing up in suburban Alexandria, Virginia, she filled her closet with vintage finds and clothes she sewed herself. Harvard, Mehlinger acknowledges, has never been fashion-forward: “It’s neither a place where you can study fashion, nor a place where people care much about fashion. But I loved that—the serious-mindedness of it. I loved that during reading period everyone walked around in sweatpants and dirty hair.”

Nevertheless, in her senior year, Mehlinger staged a fashion show

**A Colorfield chemise, in silk with mesh streamers.**



in Pforzheimer House. “I assembled a 40-person volunteer team of students, including all the models,” she recalled. “I designed and sewed the outfits in my bedroom. It was lots of fun, but it was also a test. I wanted to gauge whether my love for fashion was something I felt strongly enough about to throw myself into.”

It was. After Commencement (her graduation gift was her prized Bernina sewing machine), she worked for Gap in San Francisco, then Manhattan, designing women’s wear and intimates. In 2005, what began as a three-month trip became a yearlong journey traversing North Africa, Europe, Australia, and Asia. The travels bolstered her independence. “I returned with the confidence to start Lola Haze,” she says.

Each collection begins in the imagination. “I sketch and sketch and sketch,” she says. “I start pushing ideas to see where they’ll take me.” For her “I Love/Hate Lucy”



**In collaboration with artist Charlotte Pinson, Mehlinger designed a striking top (left) and bird-themed dress, both hand-painted on silk.**

fall 2010 collection, “I was working with the concept of destruction,” she says, indicating fabric samples patterned by burning and discharge dying (a chemical process that removes color in a controlled manner).

Next comes the stage Mehlinger calls “creative discipline.” With her drawings tacked to the wall, she conceives the collection. “I chop what doesn’t make sense,”

## Chapter & Verse

Correspondence on not-so-famous lost words

**Douglas Watson requests** a source for: “You tell me I am wrong. Who are you to tell me I am wrong? I am not wrong.” He was told the author was D.H. Lawrence, but has not been able to verify that.

**James Friguglietti hopes for** a citation for an aphorism attributed to Oscar Wilde: “The best way to destroy a man’s reputation is to tell the truth about him.”

**“Learning about normal functioning from extreme cases”** (September-October 2009). James Finkelstein sent an earlier statement of the principle, from William Harvey’s Letter to John Vlackveld (April 24, 1657): “Nature is nowhere accustomed more openly to display her secret mysteries than in cases where she shows tracings of her workings apart from the beaten paths; nor is there any better way to advance the proper practice of medicine than to give our minds to the discovery of the

usual law of nature, by careful investigation of cases of rarer forms of disease.”

**“I am firm. You are stubborn. He is...”** (March-April). Dick Dodds found this remark attributed, without citation, to British journalist Katharine Elizabeth Whitehorn on Wikipedia, and Richard Friedman found it reprinted in *The Best of Sydney J. Harris* (1975) as “I am a man of firm principles; you tend to be stubborn; he is pigheaded.” (Harris was a longtime columnist for the *Chicago Daily News*.) But Susan Zucker Leff cited S.I. Hayakawa’s *Language in Thought and Action* (2d ed.; 1964), which states in chapter 6 that “Bertrand Russell, on a British Broadcasting Company radio program called the ‘Brains Trust,’ gave the following ‘conjugation’ of an ‘irregular verb’: I am firm. You are obstinate. He is a pig-headed fool.” The *New Statesman and Nation* then ran “Week-end Competition No. 952,” seeking additional

examples, and printed the best of the 2,000 results on June 5, 1948, validating recollections by Fran Donohue Hanson, Diane Zelby Witlieb, and Martin Mayer of such a contest. Witlieb forwarded one remembered example (“I have reconsidered it. You have changed your mind. He has gone back on his word.”), Mayer another (“I have about me something of the subtle, haunting, mysterious perfumes of the Orient. You rather overdo it, dear. She stinks.”).

**“...unwise to publish one’s theory until late in life”** (March-April). Herb Klein was the first of several readers who identified this passage from the introduction of Harvard professor Daniel Gilbert’s 2006 bestseller, *Stumbling on Happiness*.

Send inquiries and answers to “Chapter and Verse,” *Harvard Magazine*, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, or via e-mail to [chapterandverse@harvardmag.com](mailto:chapterandverse@harvardmag.com).

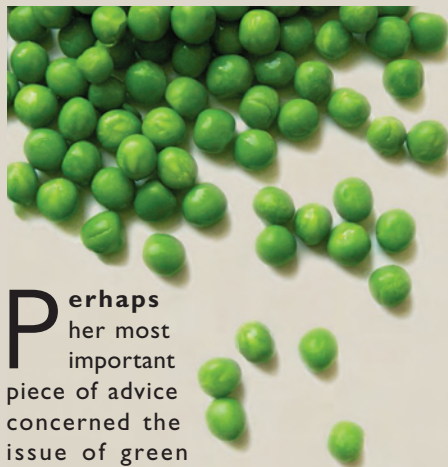


O P E N B O O K

# The Green-Pea Memo

**Neil J. Smelser** '52, Ph.D. '58, JF '58, is an acclaimed sociologist and scholar of higher education, at Berkeley and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. (In the latter capacity, he advised Dean Drew Faust on the new Radcliffe Insti-

tute's role and structure.) His *Reflections on the University of California* (California, \$45) would be an ideal gift for President Faust and Corporation members, Overseers, deans, or department chairs, for its lucid, enduring 1994 essay on governing that institution. Turns out he is also a wicked satirist: the "Thanksgiving Dinner Report," a 1977 mock memo on serving the meal to study-abroad students in England, was written, he observes, "to poke fun at the academic-bureaucratic mentality of university life." Herewith, an unseasonable excerpt, beginning with wisdom from Ruth Eigner, a predecessor:



**P**erhaps her most important piece of advice concerned the issue of green peas. She warned, "avoid serving green peas." Upon being pressed for reasons she said that green peas have a way of falling off plates, and that they fall between things. The main things they fall between, moreover, are students' shoes and the carpet. This suggestion made good sense to all of us, except Alan Nelson [associate director], whose house has a carpet that is pea-green in color. He forcefully presented the argument that it was in *his* house that the green peas were going to be served, and if crushed they would not show on his carpet. He actually went so far as to suggest that crushed green peas might be of some organic value to the carpet.... After weighing the arguments, I ruled against green peas. As a matter of fact, I was sufficiently impressed with Ruth Eigner's advice that I submitted to the staff the idea of imposing a *general* size limitation on things served, think-

ing, perhaps, that no single item should be smaller than an American-size golf ball. This idea proved overdrawn, largely because it was too restrictive. It would, for instance, have ruled out carrot sticks and sliced cucumbers, which proved to be a refreshing change from the diet of overcooked vegetables that our students had been eating in various universities' dining halls....

You should also be aware of the paper plate problem. I do not want to appear critical of the British paper manufacturing industry, but I have to say that paper plates are not their *forte*....

Actually, working on the paper plate problem served to deepen my thinking on the issue of green peas. After considering the matter carefully, I have decided that it is not completely fair to claim that green peas, *as such*, constitute the problem. To think that way is to penetrate the issue only superficially. Rather, it is when you begin to think of green peas *in combination with soggy* paper plates that you advance toward grasping its essence. In fact, I would put the primary onus on the plates rather than the peas; almost *anything* would fall off those plates. When you move beyond thinking about green peas alone, in short, the green-pea issue itself becomes much less significant and pressing. I thought I would pass this insight on to you, so that you might share it in the future with directors-elect and their spouses.

she says. "I assign colors and fabrics. I make sure there's unity and relevance, that the pieces don't eat at [work against] each other, and that nothing is superfluous." This phase embodies Mehlinger's highest aspirations. "I'm not talking about the discipline it takes to work hard, because that's a given," she says. "I'm talking about making creations that suit the consumer. I want to design things that wearers will love, that will become emotional for them and work within their lives."

Mehlinger has refined her understanding of the relationship between commerce and creativity. "I used to think it was like a Venn diagram," she says, "with a place where both could coexist. But ideas that push fashion forward, that really make

**"But ideas that push fashion forward," she says, "that really make you think, do not have mass appeal."**

you think, do not have mass appeal. So I've come to see it more as a spectrum."

In determining her position on that spectrum, Mehlinger has looked to other designers she admires, like Issey Miyake, whose lines incorporate both innovative and commercial pieces. Each Lola Haze collection includes designs that are more intricate and higher priced ("a little more fun and interesting," she says) along with more commercial, "everyday-comfortable" pieces. "I'm still learning, but I've been surprised at how many people end up buying the crazy things."

As a one-woman operation based in Brooklyn, Mehlinger sews her own prototypes, which she uses to market her goods. Sales are primarily wholesale, generated by word of mouth, through the company's website ([www.lolahaze.com](http://www.lolahaze.com)), and at the twice-yearly CURVExpo lingerie trade show. Mehlinger supervises production at a factory in the city's garment district. "I go there carrying my bolts of fabric," she says. "I love being such a *garmento!*"

*Susan Hodara '75 is a freelance journalist whose articles have appeared in the New York Times and other publications.*

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