

Chicago Tribune

Macy's trumps Field's' local designer support

By Kelly Haramis
Tribune staff reporter

The familiar logo may be disappearing, but the New York-based Macy's will continue Marshall Field's commitment to the local fashion scene when it officially changes labels Saturday.

Macy's local designer shop, the Designers of Chicago at Macy's on State Street, will showcase 47 Chicago-based designers and their collections, ranging from handbags to apparel to jewelry.

Yet in keeping with Chicago's rising fashion profile, there will be some key differences. Macy's corporate buyers chose more than double the designers (47 compared with 19 last year). Also, the collections will be featured for the entire season, not just for one month as with the former Field's.

The shop will begin on the first floor (it was only on the third floor last year). When Macy's begins decorating for the holidays, the designers' collections will relocate to their respective areas--for instance, men's clothing in men's clothing and so on.

"I think it will open the door to the possibility of getting national exposure for some of the designers," said Melissa Turner, director of fashion arts and events for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs.

The Macy's shop kicks off what will surely be an exciting month for fashion with various Fashion Focus Chicago events--Glamorama fundraiser and Gen Art's Fresh Faces in Fashion show--on the horizon.

On State Street, that fashion plate street

Starting Saturday, Designers of Chicago at Macy's on State Street shop features 47 rising

local talents. Ori'en, Bya Denim, Tivi and Elizabeth Brady are just a sampling of Chicago's fashion-forward future.

Ori'en

After being turned down last year for Marshall Field's designer shop, Chicago designer Cyndi Chan wasn't expecting the call to be included in the Designers of Chicago at Macy's on State Street shop.

And Macy's didn't call. They e-mailed.

"I thought it was a survey. I then started reading it, and I started crying. Like if I got engaged."

The 30-year-old Hong Kong native juggles three of her own unique brands: Zen T (tanks and tees), Ori-Jeans (custom-made denim) and Ori'en (couture). Macy's will feature her fourth Ori'en collection, "Independent Chic--A Trip to Remember," which she describes as "a trip to Paris" and "girls night out." The pieces retail for \$80 to \$450.

Chan may be young, but she carries street cred, interning at Donna Karan and working for rapper Nelly's design company, Vokal in New York.

Now she has swapped the Chrysler Building for Sears Tower. "There are a lot of entrepreneurs here; in New York, there are a lot of people working at the [corporate] design firm."

Chan sees Chicago as seriously D.I.Y. "A lot of designers here have to do everything." She not only designs but also invoices, attends sales meetings and hits trunk shows--without fashion foot soldiers.

ORI'EN | ARTICLES & PUBLICITY

Web Address:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/chi-0609030369sep03,1,2684376.story?coll=chi-news-hed&ctrack=1&cset=true>

More work, sure, but more freedom. "Every single piece needs to be a hit. I have to love it or else I can't sell it."

Chan's Ori'en line sells at La Collezione, 1926 S. Wabash St., and Casa de Soul, 1919 W. Division St., which houses both her workroom and showroom.

On the Chicago fashion scene in five years: "More and more designers will have their own boutiques."

"Like SoHo or the East Village . . . Celebrities will stay at The Peninsula [hotel] and shop [locally]." She adds: "I'm not planning on going anywhere. Chicago is awesome."

-- For more information, see e-intime.com/orien1.html.

Bya Denim

With a name like Stiles Anderson, you'd think this denim newcomer was destined for fashion. Yet, Bya Denim's designer worked as a financial analyst for Merrill Lynch only one year ago.

That's when Anderson, 24, teamed up with Glen Schwartz, 31, and decided to swap green for blue, money for denim. Schwartz comes from a different type of green. He has a background in environmental policy and environmental law.

With Anderson as designer and Schwartz as CEO, the two formed Bya (from "billions of years ago") to "make some noise in the denim world," said the guys.

And somebody must be listening. Bya Denim's (pronounced bee-why-aaay) first collection will sell for \$185-\$219 at Macy's local designer shop. The collection is also available at Guise, 2217 N. Halsted St., and about 15 other stores in Chicago, Detroit and Minneapolis.

Anderson couldn't be happier. "Nothing compares to doing what I'm able to do now. Somehow it all worked out," he said.

Working out is working with a conscience. Bya's owners make it a point to avoid sweatshop labor. "We check factories . . . that people are paid a fair wage," Anderson said.

Anderson hails from Wayzata, Minn., and Schwartz from Farmington Hills, Mich. But Bya's mission is tied to Illinois' very jeans-friendly metropolis. "[We're] two young energetic guys . . . trying to make a name for ourselves and Chicago fashion," Schwartz said.

For Bya, Chicago fashion is an unplucked flower: "I think it's blossoming, and it's great what the mayor's doing. It would be great to have Chicago become a fashion hub. I think there are undiscovered talents," Anderson said.

On the Chicago fashion scene in five years: "Chicago could be mentioned in the same breath as Toronto, New York and L.A. . . . and not just for the Magnificent Mile," said Schwartz.

-- For more information, see byadenim.com.

Elizabeth Brady

After 20 years in advertising, Elizabeth Brady, 42, decided it was time to follow in her family's footsteps.

Her grandmother Irene Koehnemann sold handmade shoes in the 1920s--under the Irene moniker--to Marshall Field's and Saks Fifth Avenue.

Brady's fall line (\$415-\$595) will also be a part of Macy's local designer shop, and she describes the collection as "whimsical and sexy and exhilarating. It's very fashion forward. I've created some styles that you wouldn't find elsewhere."

And Brady's new collection, rich with eye-popping color and attention to detail, builds upon the softer hues of her first, which hit shelves last spring at Josephine, 1405 N. Wells St.

The leather shoes are handmade in Italy. "My design sensibilities are really to look at interesting combinations of textures and patterns," she said.

Honoring her grandmother's legacy as well as celebrating the modern woman, Brady gave each pair a female name. "[My grandmother] would be thrilled to see the 'Irene' shoe sitting in the store at State and Wacker . . . much like hers did in the '20s."

The exuberant design perhaps mirrors Chicago's rising fashion fortunes: Chicago fashion "needed to find a champion and that champion is the Fashion [Advisory] Council," Brady said.

On the Chicago fashion scene in five years: "It's important for companies and organizations to get behind the talent in the city because that's what's going to get us the recognition of being a fashion town."

-- For more information: see elizabethbradyshoes.com.

Tivi

When the guys behind Tivi trace their origin to "tooling around," it's more than a figure of speech.

Ryan Wither, 28, and Paul Lewin, 25, make industrial-inspired handbags, bracelets and pendants. They work primarily with stainless steel and wood, said Lewin, "because that's what we know."

Tivi (pronounced tev-ee) will return to the local designer shop for the second straight year, but Wither and Lewin (whose father works in human resources for Tribune Co., which owns this newspaper) have roots far removed from Chicago fashion.

Wither, a veteran of the furniture industry, and Lewin, who worked for a firm that designed television news sets, met at California's Savannah College of Art and Design. They share a populist vision: "We're regular T-shirt and jeans kind of guys trying to mingle with a different crowd."

No requiem for the common man here. Aside from Macy's, where Tivi goods will cost \$60 to \$280, the line sells in more than 30 stores in the U.S., plus in Australia and France.

They may be regular guys, but do they always share the same vision?

"Yes and no. [Wither] is more of an engineer designer, and I'm more of an artsy designer," Lewin said.

Wither is based in Colorado, and Naperville-raised Lewin returned from the West Coast: "You have to leave California because it can envelop you. In Chicago you can have access to everything."

Nonetheless, Lewin said the scene is still young, "[It's] anemic but growing. A few years ago it was really bad, but now it's a toddler ... pretty soon the training wheels will come off."

On the Chicago fashion scene in five years: "More word of mouth--like L.A. and New York ... as long as people get the idea of cornfields out of their heads," Lewin said.

-- For more information, see tiviwear.com.