



magazine

lifestyle + fashion + town TM
baton rouge



FASHIONABLE
BATON ROUGE

also in this issue:

PAUL MAINIERI
Baton Rouge's Home Run



"If you have the talent and drive, then you can make it happen anywhere."

Claire Sanchez in her studio office

Moving Fashion Forward

CONTENT MARGARET HOUSER

FASHION IN THE CAPITAL CITY HAS NEVER HAD MORE EMPHASIS THAN IT DOES NOW. WITHIN THE LAST DECADE THERE HAS BEEN A FOCUS ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF THE FASHION, ARTS, AND ENTERTAINMENT SECTORS IN BATON ROUGE. WITH AN INCREASE IN LOCAL BOUTIQUES AND NATIONAL RETAILERS IN THE AREA, BATON ROUGE SHOPPERS ARE ABLE TO STAY ATTUNE WITH CURRENT TRENDS AND STYLES MUCH EASIER THAN BEFORE. AS A RESULT, THE FASHION FORWARD ARE MORE CONFIDENT IN WEARING WHAT THEY PLEASE AND LESS INCLINED TO FOLLOW MORE TRADITIONAL LOOKS. BY GIVING ITS CITIZENS MORE INCENTIVES TO STAY IN THE CITY, BATON ROUGEANS ARE NOT FEELING THE NEED TO RELOCATE TO AREAS SUCH AS NEW YORK, LOS ANGELES, OR DALLAS TO GET THEIR FASHION FIX.

Talented designers and skilled artists remain in our humble state in order to pursue their ventures amongst their friends and family. The talent that exists in Baton Rouge and our surrounding areas is impressive. Creativity, craftsmanship and business skills are all qualities that Claire Sanchez, Maggie Kleinpeter and Seema Sudan possess. These remarkable women are the masterminds behind their businesses as well as the creative sources of their products. They all are proud to call Louisiana their home and eager to make it a more beautiful and fashionable place.

This couldn't be truer for handbag designer, Claire Sanchez, who was born and raised in Baton Rouge. She is a business woman by nature, having started her first successful company at the age of 12. She later went on to pursue an education at Savannah College of art and design. After graduation, she returned home where she applied her knack for design and savvy business skills in order to expand her company, Claire Sanchez Studios, LLC.

Sanchez bases her creative process on necessity as well as her own personal style, which is timeless, modern, and functional.

"I use handbags as a framework to showcase beautiful fabrics," Sanchez said.



She uses a range of colors and patterns for her collections, which make her pieces unique and appropriate for whatever the occasion may be. Shoppers can find everything from the perfect cocktail clutch to the basic everyday bag on her Web site. She prides herself on the fact that her bags are all made in the United States, but specifically constructed at a sewing company in Franklinton, Louisiana. Her family, friends and business are all rooted in the community and she is hopeful that other designers like her, "will consider how they can contribute to the fashion and art scene [here] before moving elsewhere."

The future for Claire Sanchez handbags will include fabric bags, leather designs, and possibly an expansion into baby and pet products. Although she is local, Ms. Sanchez has had her bags showcased in Country Living Magazine as well as in the 2005 Screen Actors Guild Awards gift basket. According to Sanchez, the biggest fashion faux pas is carrying the wrong bag.

"Accessories are like punctuation for your look," Sanchez said. "They can make or break an outfit. Please use them accordingly."

Maggie Kleinpeter also lived elsewhere before moving back to Baton Rouge. She received her graduate degree from Hunter College in New York. While living there, she discovered her talent as a designer when she started experimenting with scarf making. She began selling the scarves she made at local venues and found that there was a steady demand for her products, so she decided to go into business. The name SuperMaggie was coined by her partner Michael Pittard and in 2000 the company was born. They specialize in one-of-a-kind, merino wool scarves that are unique in shape and color. Her scarves can be classified as functional statement pieces and be paired with almost any outfit! She constructs

each piece by hand through a detailed felting process that can last up to three hours. Maggie started using wool as a medium after seeing a felt bag she adored at a flea market in New York. She is constantly finding new sources of inspiration, and is currently researching historical wallpaper and bird drawings to incorporate into her designs. She depends on her background in painting and art to aid her in the creative development of her products. The scarves Maggie makes are special in that there is only one of each kind she creates, so her customers are truly walking away with pieces that can not be found anywhere else.

SuperMaggie's customers vary in styles, but all generally have what Maggie describes as, "an independent sense of fashion." Besides scarves, SuperMaggie creates men's, women's, and baby tops and t-shirts that vary in color and design as well as handmade felt flower pins that can be placed anywhere from a handbag to a top.

Since moving back to Baton Rouge, Maggie finds that she has been able

to focus more time on her expansion into apparel, and credits the change to the city's availability of space as well as its more relaxing environment. Of the things that she loves most about the area she says Michael and her enjoy being, "able to live in a house with a garden and have warm weather in February."

New Orleans, like Baton Rouge, is a place that is a constant source of inspiration and Seema Sudan of LiaMolly can attest to this. Sudan is the artistic mind behind the label LiaMolly, which is named after her four-year-old son Liam and eleven-year-old daughter Molly. Her family and business life are very much interconnected and she works to make the two "coexist peacefully." Seema has always been interested in fashion and design, but distinctly recalls starting to knit at the age of nine. She

newest fad for the season. Instead she says, "I nally feel content in my vision that I no longer need to chase trends."

LiaMolly products are sold at 100 independently owned boutiques across America and London, and are also sold at Anthropologie and Bloomingdale's. The label has yet to acquire a Baton Rouge retailer, but all products can be purchased on her Web site online. Her advice to others who are interested in pursuing a fashion career is to, "cultivate your vision, look at fashions past and present and look for inspiration everywhere."

Art is a common theme in fashion and it is also a common theme among these designers who are all inspired by the people in their lives, their home and the world around them. Their gift is to be able to translate



Maggie Kleinpeter

Photo courtesy of SuperMaggie

has since nurtured and developed her talent and finds that being a designer entails having an "open mind, thick skin and constant curiosity." LiaMolly is a "sweater exclusive" company that offers a variety of tops, dresses, vests, cardigans and bottoms. Each of her pieces is ultra-feminine, rich with color, and has a focus on detail and technical design. These elements combined make her apparel line different than her competitors. She finds that most designers in her field depend on basic designs and cashmere in order to create their pieces. Seema feels strongly about the element of design and the importance of creating personal style through what one wears.

Her studio is based out of New Orleans, but she just recently made the trek to the capital city for her first trunk show in the area. She believes that Baton Rouge and New Orleans' shoppers are on the same page as far as fashion stands and describes the local market as "smart and style savvy." She draws most of her inspiration from her environment and gives credit to the New Orleans' Mardi Gras Indians for inspiring her Fall '09 line. While some designers stress about keeping up with runway trends and forecasting seasonal colors, Seema isn't worried about imitating the

these elements of inspiration into everyday wearable art. Although each designer works with different mediums and on different canvases, they all show creativity and skill in their field. Being a designer means that one must have a commitment to his or her end product and a motivation to do whatever it takes to make that piece come to life. Each of these women are proven examples that it is possible to successfully create fashion right here in their own backyard.

Baton Rouge and Louisiana as a whole are eager to support its local designers and artists. The city has made much progress in the last decade and will only continue to grow and prosper with new talent and fresh ideas.

"If you have the talent and drive, then you can make it happen anywhere," said Sanchez. +