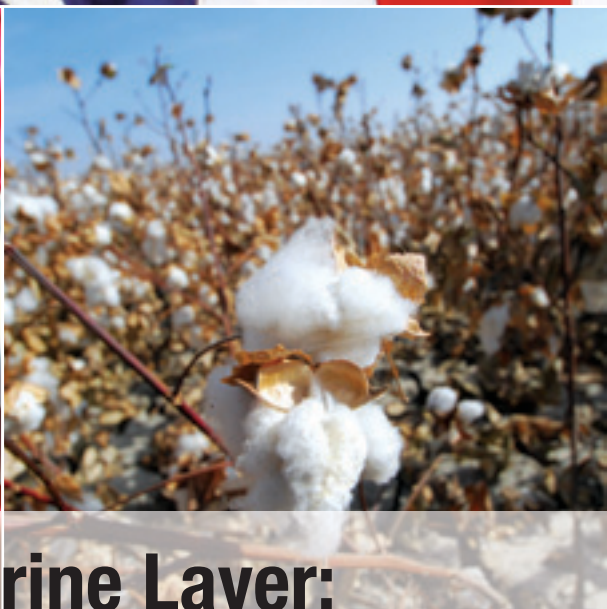
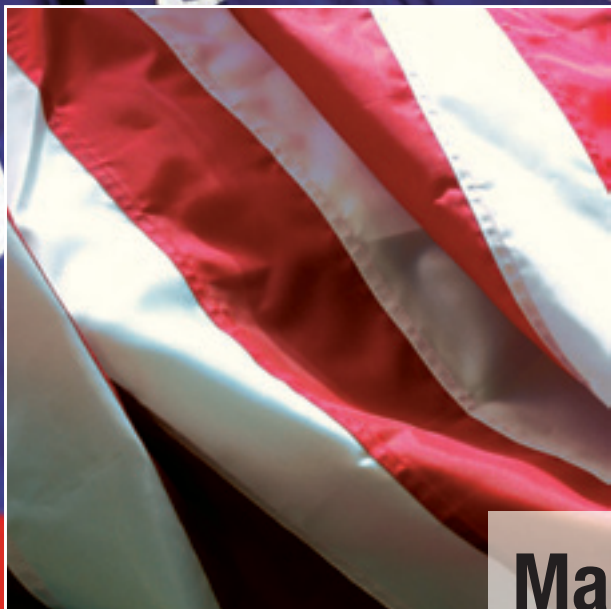


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A CALIFORNIA APPAREL NEWS SPECIAL SECTION

JANUARY 2014



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MADE IN THE USA

Marine Layer: Specialty Fabrics, Specialized Fits

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

After a few years working finance jobs, Michael Natenshon switched careers and revved up what may be a new wave in T-shirts.

Natenshon, a novice clothier and the chief executive officer of San Francisco-based **Marine Layer Inc.**, started making T-shirts with a proprietary blend of Pima cotton and Modal fabric. "It was not something people were doing in

in October. The company also runs two branded shops in San Francisco; one in Palo Alto, Calif.; and another in Portland, Ore.

Natenshon plans to forego wholesaling his brand and focus on building more Marine Layer boutiques in America. There's a good chance that a lot more people will be receptive to his pitch for T-shirts with a unique fabrication, said T-shirt guru Isaac Nichelson of Los Angeles-area manufacturing consultancy **Sustainable Source Studios**.

"There is so little differentiation in T-shirts," Nichelson said. "We're just starting to see this trend of emerging, specialty high-end tees, made from alternative fiber blends, things other than cotton and poly." Sustainable Source Studios maintains an emphasis on alternative fiber blends such as hemp.

Marine Layer also hopes to build a point of difference in T-shirt sizing. Instead of conventional T-shirt sizing of small, medium and large, the basics label is the champion of in-between sizing. Marine Layer sizes are small, medium, "marge" (the half size between medium and large), large and "larger."

"Mediums never fit right," Natenshon said of his own clothes-shopping experiences. "Larges were too big, but in jackets you had a lot more size options."

Getting the right sizes and the right texture in the fabric took a lot of trial and error, Natenshon said.

It started in 2009 when Natenshon, a **University of California, Berkeley**, business school graduate, decided a career



in finance was not for him.

"It was a mutual parting of ways," he joked about leaving finance. "No one shed a tear."

But he was intrigued about making T-shirts. He started cold calling Los Angeles-area knitting mills. The mills showed him thousands of yarn blends, but he kept rejecting different blends. "I knew exactly what I wanted," he said. "It would feel and look a certain way."

While three designers work for Marine Layer now, Natenshon designed the first shirt himself, then relied on dozens of sewers to create the right fit.

Getting the right fit took a while. One of his first runs of shirts came in an inch too short. Another run delivered shirts that were too long. He was maxing out his credit cards with his development. "If we had made 2,000 shirts in the first round, I wouldn't be around," Natenshon said. He made only 50 and sold most of them out of his apartment. In 2009, he came across a silhouette that offered a slender fit. He sold it to his friends, and the shirts sold out in a day. He knew he

➔ **Marine Layer** page 8



Marine Layer's store in Portland, Ore.

menswear," Natenshon said of his fabric. "It feels like cotton but softer."

After more than a year trying to find the right blend, in December 2009, he sold his shirts out of his San Francisco apartment. Fast forward a few years, and he currently runs five Marine Layer boutiques on prominent retail streets such as Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Los Angeles, which opened



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COMPANY PROFILE

Staples USA: Los Angeles Label Has Been Focused on Domestic Production for More Than Three Decades

By Deborah Belgium Senior Editor

When **Staples USA** started manufacturing its line of women's clothing in Los Angeles in 1980, it wasn't considered that odd to cut and sew your entire collection in a local factory. At that time, 76 percent of the clothes sold in U.S. stores came from domestic apparel factories.

Thirty-four years later, Staples USA is still making its clothes in Los Angeles even though 97.5 percent of garments sold in the United States come from overseas.

"The reason we make clothes here is we don't want to buy clothes that come from 6,000 miles away. We have been tempted many times, but it takes a lot of [energy] for a boat to cross the ocean," said Pat Stimac, one of the label's found-

wear label stay on top of trends. "Because we are the kind of company that makes fashion, we can turn things around faster if they are made here," said the designer, who has been a partner with the brand since Stimac joined forces with Gary Brownstein to launch the apparel line.

Brantley formulates her looks to match the sewing skills of local factories and to distinguish the line from other labels made overseas. "If you are going to manufacture in America, you shouldn't make anything basic that competes with China," she said. "We try to keep the clothes in our line about great new shapes. You have to be clever about what you make in America to make it successful and competitive."

Brantley said she designs powerful but simple clothes that have a unique



Rosemary Brantley



ing partners who joined forces to start a clothing line that is always stylish, fashionable and supports sustainability.

Staples' long-time designer, Rosemary Brantley, a graduate of **Parsons The New School of Design** and chair of the fashion department at **Otis School of Art and Design** in Los Angeles, says working with local apparel factories helps the updated womens-

silhouette that can be worn several ways. A crinkled blouse may have a tie in the back that also can be belted in the front.

Longer hemlines have buttons and loops to help make the dress convert into a shorter look. Jackets can be fastened in the back to make the silhouette more slimming.

Details are another strong point. Jacket buttons often are covered with fabric. Some dresses are reversible with a solid fabric on the inside and a print on the outside. The dress label is loosely sewn at the edge of the neckline so it flips over. Other dresses may have a keyhole look in the back and a rounded neck in the front that can be reversed for a varied silhouette so the keyhole is in the front and the rounded neck in the back.

Brantley likes her designs to be flexible and to fit a wide variety of body shapes. "With our clothes you can dress someone who is small or someone who is tall. I'm 5-foot-9½, and I can wear our clothes, but I have a sister and a niece who are bigger, and I have them in mind when I design pieces that you can mix and match."

At the time the label launched in 1980, Brantley was working





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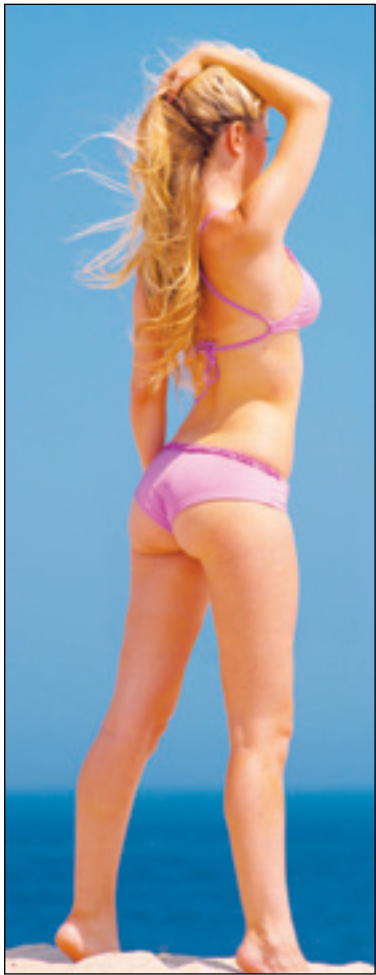


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Eden Eco and Little Eden: Eco-Friendly Swimwear for All



Emily Fioravanti is a Philadelphia native with her heart on the California coast. The Westchester, Penn.-based designer is inspired by her years living in Santa Cruz and surfing iconic West Coast surf spots from Four Mile to Lower Trestles.

"I have always lived in a bikini," Fioravanti said. "It's the standard uniform for all of my best memories. It still is even though our season is shorter on the East Coast."

For Spring 2014, Fioravanti is launching an eco-friendly swim collection made from a recycled polyester/spandex blend that is "super soft, wicks great, and has the stretch and recovery required."

"I wanted to challenge myself to make the most comfortable bikinis that stood right on the

fine line of sexy without going over," she said.

The suits are produced in Southern California, and Fioravanti tries to source all her materials "as close to home as possible to keep our carbon footprint at a minimum."

Self-described as "obsessed with clothing construction," Fioravanti designed bridal gowns for **Maria Romia Bridal Couture** before launching **Eden Eco**.

"From concept to design to production, it doesn't make a difference how much fabric and materials are involved. It's about the process and result for me," she said. "Bridal couture is mainly focused on fit. I learned more there than I ever did [or] could have in school. I absolutely called on that wisdom while creating these pieces."

In addition to Eden Eco, Fioravanti is also launching a capsule collection for girls called **Little Eden**.

"I have an 11-year-old daughter who has been my trusty sidekick since the day she was born. Everything in my life revolves around her," said Fioravanti, adding that she saw a gap in the market for age-appropriate swimwear that promotes positivity and is inspired by girls' role models.

"[Plus,] this new generation really cares about being sustainable, so it's a total added bonus that they are eco friendly," she said.

Eden Eco suits are sold in boutiques in Long Beach Island, N.J., and Huntington Beach, Calif., as well as on the company's website (www.edeneco.co).—*Alison A. Nieder*

Marine Layer *Continued from page 3*

had a business.

He currently works with more than 35 different vendors to make the men's and women's fashions sold at his stores. T-shirts are manufactured in the Los Angeles area. For woven shirts, he works with manufacturers in the San Francisco Bay Area. He estimates that it costs 25 percent to 35 percent more to manufacture in California, but his customers prefer it.

"We could be cheaper overseas. We've been able to find good vendors, and our customers value that things are made in the States. We do charge a little more. We have a better product. People will pay for it." ●



Marine Layer's store in LA's Venice neighborhood

Staples USA *Continued from page 4*

three days a week at Otis' newly formed fashion school, which initially had three instructors and 17 students. The rest of her time was devoted to the Staples USA line, which started with seven dresses.

"We did great. After seven dresses, we did 15 dresses and then sportswear. It just got bigger," Brantley said.

These days, the company is incorporating more-sustainable fabrics into its line. Brantley likes working with double knits, rayon knits and novelty knits. She also likes to coordinate fabrics so a stripe, a dot and tweed can be mixed and matched. "If you can make designs that are simple but powerful," Brantley said, "that is the best thing and the

hardest thing to do."

The Staples USA line is sold primarily to specialty stores, with wholesale prices ranging from \$29 to \$139. For more information, contact **Arlene Henry Sales** at (213) 622-6162. ●



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The quantity and diversity we could produce with Tukatech were the game-changers



With Tukatech's technology, American Apparel was able to increase its SKUs to 21,000 and its volume to 40 million units per year—and growing.

When Marty Bailey arrived at American Apparel in 2002, he found “a wholesale company focused on printables, 35 styles, all of them based on T-shirts or tanks or panties—just wasn’t a broad array of things,” he recalls. That would change, in a big way, in the ensuing decade. Under Bailey’s direction as chief manufacturing officer, American Apparel now produces 1.1 million garments per week, 40 million units last year over some 21,000 SKUs in its 1.25 million square feet of production space—the largest in the country. The downtown L.A.-based vertically integrated company also owns two knitting facilities, garment dye and piece dye houses, and operates its own retail storefronts in addition to its wholesale business.

“More and more and more, it’s becoming the rule that we’re designing, developing, and manufacturing at a pretty breakneck pace all the time,” Bailey acknowledges. “If I have a concept on a napkin on Monday, we have the ability to have it hanging on a face-out in Manhattan on Friday. It’s due to everything we do here in L.A.—design, manufacturing, the whole gamut is right here.” What makes much of this possible, he notes, is the company’s Tukatech fashion technology software systems.

Tukatech needs no introduction to the garment industry. For more than 18 years, it has taken the lead in providing both software and hardware technological solutions to the garment industry with its TUKAcad system of 3D and 2D pattern-making, marking and grading, and ultra-precise SMARTmark marking system. Bailey already knew Tukatech’s founder and CEO, Ram Sareen, when he went shopping for design and marker systems. “He’s a good guy and he has good concepts,” Bailey says. “One thing I like about Tukatech is, they know the business, not just their business. You can have conversations, it’s not just techies talking to techies.”

A key issue for American Apparel is its broad and swift-changing lineup. “It’s not so much the volume, but the number of items and the diversity that were the game-changers,” Bailey explains. “I have normally 120 to 130 styles running at any one time. While the volume increased in general, the volume of SKUs is incredible. If I were producing 200,000 pieces a day of one style, I could do it with an old-time marker system. This is a whole different way of functioning, from a manufacturing point of view.”

The challenge, as Bailey explains, is less coping with the number of items being cut—although efficiency is essential—but the speed of moving from one cut to another. “We have the most diverse cutting department I’ve ever worked with. Cutting’s job is to support our sewing.” American Apparel employs 2,700 sewing operators. “When you can minimize the amount of time for setups and creating well-utilized markers, then you’re going to service your sewing department better. If you do that, you service your end customer better with speed-to-market. To minimize that time became important, and that is where Tukatech helped us out.”

In 2010, American Apparel installed TUKAcad, the advanced CAD pattern-building, marking and grading system, as well as SMARTmark, a TUKAcad module that maximizes the placement of markers for maximum fabric utilization.

“There were a number of different reasons we chose Tukatech,” Bailey says. “Tukatech integrated easily into our cutting system, which is important. Speed of the implementation, reduced training time—any time you talk about that, it absolutely points toward an easier, user-friendly system. We were running on this in days. We were able to take the training wheels off and ride by ourselves within 30 days. And, of course, cost—it is very cost-effective. Another thing, too, Ram’s right here in L.A. We’re in L.A. We were looking beyond the purchase to what service we would have. If I needed help, I could get it real quick.”

Tukatech has worked so well for American Apparel that Bailey is exploring the possibility of adding Tukatech’s cut planning system, TUKAcut Plan. “With as many different styles and SKUs we cut on a daily basis, it could be a benefit to us,” Bailey says. “In the same way that a system helps you utilize your fabric as best it can, it can help in switching cutting from one style to another. We have people who do that now, but, to have a cut plan that is not necessarily rush-rush-rush, it could help you to plan that day as efficiently as possible.”

While manufacturers of any size can benefit from a Tukatech system, it was the perfect fit for American Apparel, Bailey notes. “Tukatech fits the way we do business,” he says. “We are absolutely happy customers. It was a good investment for us.”





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Design Knit's Creative Team Process

The group gathered around the conference table is proudly showing off the fruits of a challenging—many would say daunting—photo shoot, the new ad campaign for Los Angeles-based fabric company Design Knit Inc. The ethereal image is of an auburn-haired model seemingly floating in space, gracefully leaping, arms beautifully extended. The focal point, however, is not the lovely model but the cloud of tawny fabric gorgeousness billowing around her.

The striking photo was shot underwater in the backyard pool of Design Knit's marketing and sales associate Sarvey Tahmasebi Rector. The fact that the photographer was Rector herself, who also designed and sewed the flowing multilayered gown from a Design Knit Tencel fabric, gives insight into the workings of a company in which everyone is encouraged, like the model, to take a leap.

"Some may think this is stock photography," says Shala Tabassi, Design Knit's CEO. "But everyone needs to know that our creative process—not only fabric, but everything related to our fabric—is thanks to the talented team that we have here, and that's what makes our fabrics unique."

"We like to show that we can push boundaries as a company," continues daughter Pat Tabassi, head of product development and marketing.

The gathering at the table—Tabassi senior and junior, Rector and sales representative Jennifer Mehranvary—comprises the think tank of Design Knit. The younger members bounce ideas and

quality knit-to-order fabrics, sheer to sweater weight, in a variety of materials and blends. The company is a Supima licensee, using a majority of Buhler's yarns, including Supima cotton and Supima micro-Modal, and yarns made from Lenzing fibers. Other fabrications make use of mélange yarn dyes, rayon, wool, Tencel, linen, cashmere and silk blends, double and single knits such as novelty, jersey, pointelle, piqué, thermal, fleece, French terry and sweater knits. With samples numbering about 1,000, plus archived fabrics, the showroom at its 50,000-square-foot downtown Los Angeles facility is fairly bursting. Design Knit produces about 30 to 50 new fabrics each season, but "continuously we are making new styles," Shala says. "Our customers are constantly asking, What's new?" She estimates that "about 60 to 70 percent of contemporary brands in better department stores" include Design Knit fabrics." As Rector explains, "Our priority is to help our customers stand out in the market."

Prior to expanding the creative team, Shala was running everything from production to sales to accounting. The pride she takes in her creative team, whom she has taken under her wing, is evident as she listens to them discuss the process. "We've learned everything from her," Pat says simply, and the others nod. "We're at the point where we can be creatively independent. But we go to her to ask, What do you think?"

"And," says Shala, "sometimes I say no, I want to change it to something else. We want to have the best and most interesting product in the market."

Design Knit's team dynamic is readily apparent in the clutch of samples on the table, a study in fabric design evolution. The group had looked at a delicate slubbed tri-blend jersey in teal, a perfect color and weight for early fall. It might look nice, they decided, in a heavier weight rib knit with stripes—Mehranvary had the size of the stripes in mind. How would it look in an even heavier French terry solid? How about striped French terry? "One person will say something and it will spark an idea," Mehranvary notes. From this basic fabric, Shala explains, "we end up with six or seven different fabrics."

The buzz of the creative process is echoed in the hum of Design Knit's 45 knitting machines, visible from the conference room window, which stretch a full block. The majority of Design Knit's business is in pfd—prepared for dye—with the remainder yarn-dyed. Customers can order up to 20 yards for sampling before placing an order. It is Shala's particular pride that all of her company's production and finishing is done locally, and a majority of its yarn is produced in the U.S.A.—a

business model that often raises eyebrows. "At shows, people will ask, 'Where are you based?'" Pat recounts. "I'll say, 'Los Angeles.' They say, 'No, where do you knit?' I say, 'Los Angeles.' They say, 'No, really, where is your production done?' I say, 'Los Angeles.' People are shocked."

Promoting Made in America is part of Design Knit's mission, and the staff will help those

looking to manufacture locally with references to reliable cut-and-sew and dye houses. Design Knit's teamwork concept extends to its many fiercely loyal customers as well as new ones, Pat says. "We are very involved with their process," she notes. "They trust our expertise, and they seek our opinion."

Design Knit also partners with design schools, donating yardage to students for their shows and offering eye-opening tours and lectures to students who,

Rector notes, need to understand that "fabric is the start to everything in the industry."

Back at the table, the talk moves to the showroom design for the upcoming L.A. Textile Show. The theme, not surprisingly, is "our creative team process and how it works"—and, also not surprisingly, everyone is working on



A few new styles for Fall/Winter



The Design Knit creative team at work

inspirations off one another like skilled volleyball players, overseen, and only occasionally vetoed, by their coach and mentor, Shala. A trained physicist with a lifelong passion for fashion design, Tabassi seamlessly merged both interests in starting up Design Knit in 1985. Daughter Pat, who had gone into international trade as a profession, was drawn back into the company seven years ago when her mother was sidelined with neck and spine issues. She's never left.

"I grew up at Design Knit but didn't really understand the specifics of what my mother did until I was in this position," Pat says. "I thought, this is not my background. But my other work was very regimented. This is about touching and feeling and creating. I had the best mentor possible, and we have such a great team."

Design Knit specializes in high-end, high-



The front entrance of Design Knit

it. "We're the Martha Stewarts of the fabric industry," Rector laughs. "We really do everything ourselves—set up the showroom, even make the signs. We love the creative process."

Watching her team in action, a contented Shala Tabassi turns reflective. "We want to say, design, from beginning to end, is done with a passion, a pride, in a happy mood. Now I am really happy, proud of the results I see at the end."

design knit inc.

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