

## Ready-to-Wear Report

## Labels Diving In Despite Wall Street Worries

Four design teams are forging ahead with launches, despite the shaky economy. Each insists their label addresses new pockets of business. Time will tell.

**SUNO**

Manufacturing in Nairobi, Kenya, Max Osterweis faces deterrents most start-ups don't see — routine power outages, overturned buses and the occasional wayward snake. With his new label, Suno, which makes its debut this spring at Opening Ceremony, he is trying to work around those things to build a thriving business that employs Kenyan workers and shows off their artistry.

Osterweis first traveled to Nairobi 13 years ago when his mother, for whom the collection is named, built a house there. He has collected textiles since then and now has something to do with all that fabric. Wary that Kenya's recent postelection upheaval might keep tourists and potential investors in the country away, Osterweis is determined to use the local talent. "The Kenyan people really get the big picture. Hopefully, if this works, we will be able to do a lot of things here," he said. "There is a lot of opportunity for jobs here."

The first collection consists of 1,000 one-of-a-kind pieces and the second one will be double that size. In addition to Opening Ceremony's stores in New York and Los Angeles, Osterweis plans to sell the line in six other stores in six other cities. Retail prices will range from \$160 for a tank to \$600 for a dress.

Osterweis divides his time between New York and Nairobi, and his background is as diverse as those two places. A graduate of New York University's film school, he recently was commissioned to write the screenplay for a feature-length action film, but will continue to design Suno. He said fashion has similarities to film. "In a way, designing clothes is the same thing as making a film in that you are telling a visual story."

— Rosemary Feitelberg

**CELEBUTANTE**

Khary Septh and Tony Brown decided to name their collection Celebutante to take a jab at the starlets lionized by the fashion tabloids. The business partners think many have maxed out on celebrity-backed lines. "This young lady is tired of putting money in all these other people's pockets. She has decided, 'You know what? I'm the star,'" said Brown.

Septh said the 18-piece holiday collection is attainable and wearable, with dresses wholesaling from \$53 to \$98. First-year sales should hit \$750,000, Brown said. Monaco provided the inspiration for the spring Glam Prix collection, but "it's not so literal that it becomes gimmicky," said Septh, whose résumé includes jobs at GayleMetGlenn and Sean John Womens. Beyoncé Knowles, Liv Tyler, Penélope Cruz and others wore his GayleMetGlenn designs. "This is for a girl who plays with trends each season but still calls her look her own."

Brown's 20-year run in the fashion industry includes work at Ralph Lauren Purple Label, Laundry by Shelli Segal and BCBG. "I love all the trashy magazines, but I am always wondering, 'What, exactly, is a celebute?' Nicole Richie is a perfect example of what our customers are kind of over. We decided to turn our customers into celebuteantes," she said.

— R.F.

**MIKAEL AGHAL**

Nearly a year after Mikael Aghal launched its signature eveningwear in the U.S., the company has rolled out daytime dresses for spring.

Creative director-designer Michael Hakimi said he is responding to demand for what retailers are calling "date dresses," styles that fit the bill in the office but can also be worn after work. The 32-piece collection

Looks from Suno.



A Celebutante dress.



is aimed at working women who don't have the time to buzz home to change their clothes after work before heading out on the town, Hakimi said. "It's a brand-new category," he continued, adding that several of his female friends have commented about the need for styles that are not so evening oriented and not so casual.

Due in stores in January, the collection consists of flirty silhouettes with special attention to details such as embroidery, piping, accented waistlines and pockets. The company's first effort for daytime dresses uses European cottons in neutral tones and black and white, with a sand-colored cotton sateen dress with a heart-shaped bodice with short sleeves and a leather belt being a standout.

The dresses wholesale from \$140 to \$165 and will be available at Saks Fifth Avenue and other select retailers. First-year projected wholesale volume is \$1 million, Hakimi said.

— R.F.

**SILOONIM**

Coming up with new and interesting ways to interpret the white shirt is no easy task, but that's what new line Siloonim is trying to do.

The Irvington, N.Y.-based line of white shirts, launching for spring, is the brainchild of longtime friends Lois Rosenthal and Minoo Hersini. For both, fashion is a new venture. Rosenthal owns a bath and body products business in South Africa, while Hersini

studied interior design and owns and operates Au Ciel, a floral and event-planning studio in Irvington. The duo became friends after Hersini did the wedding of Rosenthal's daughter.

"It is like a white paper to me," said Hersini, who designs the line. "I always wear a white blouse. With a classic white blouse with a twist, you have a good base."

Siloonim is a combination of the partners' first names in reverse. The launch collection features 16 pieces, from a simple white V-neck shirt with a silk organza detail in the back to an organic bamboo shirt with pleated sleeves and a cotton shirt with dozens of cotton floral appliqué around the collar and sleeve. Each style comes with a makeup mask in a small sac to avoid staining the shirt.

The collection, which is sold through the ADC Showroom, has wholesale price points from \$160 to \$250. For spring, it was picked up by Nolita in Portland, Ore., and Silver Creek in Ketchum, Idaho. Asked for sales projections, Rosenthal said the primary goal amid this financial climate is to familiarize retailers and customers with the label. "Some people say that bad times like this are great times to start a business," Rosenthal said.

For fall, Hersini is expanding the line with one skirt design in midnight blue, charcoal gray and chocolate brown, which will work as accents to her white shirts. She also plans to embellish her shirt designs and add children's and men's shirts.

— Marc Karimzadeh

Shirts are on the menu at Lugo Caffè.



## MARKET BASKET

**ESPRESSO AND SHIRTS:** Lugo, a boutique in Manhattan's NoLiTa neighborhood known for its Italian-made shirts, has set up a Midtown outpost. Lugo Caffè is located at 1 Penn Plaza. In addition to well-tailored shirts, which are sold via a computer kiosk, the new 4,000-square-foot eatery, which opened last month, serves Italian comfort food and cocktails.

Despite a built-in customer base in the 2.5 million square feet of office space in 1 Penn Plaza, Lugo co-owner John Meadow is aiming to attract more fashion types. "I know we'll always make money with the business types, but our biggest goal is to attract [people from] the Garment Center," he said, adding that Lugo Caffè strives to recapture Italy's storied cafe culture.

"There really aren't many places in New York where people are reading the paper, drinking a Pellegrino and having a coffee."

Aside from tucking into Roman artichokes, patrons can buy women's and men's shirts — most of which retail for \$175. The spring collection of women's shirts will consist of 10 styles. The inclusion of artichokes on the menu is a veiled form of branding, since the motif is used throughout the cafe and is also used for Lugo's logo. Naturally, the waitstaff wear Lugo shirts, too.

To try to woo more fashion types, the company recruited DJ Felix Cutlilo, who developed the playlist for Bergdorf Goodman, to make one for the cafe.

— R.F.