

LISA BUTTERWORTH

Designing Women

SPRING means a number of wonderful things: refreshing rain showers, the breakthrough of the sun, ice in your coffee, an abundance of Cadbury eggs and—perhaps best of all—the opportunity for a whole new wardrobe. This season, simple silhouettes, the resurrected dress and chic shorts are all the rage, and San Francisco fashion is no exception. Without the shiny Hollywood influence of Los Angeles and the hard-edged style scene of New York, the Bay Area is cultivating its own fashion-breaking community rife with young female designers with a creative addiction and an entrepreneurial itch. With earthy tones and bright colors catching their eye rather than the muted whites and neutrals of the runways, these women are taking tips from the mainstream while keeping true to a style all their own, exactly what one might expect from San Francisco.

Susan Hengst

Shorts feature prominently in Susan Hengst's eponymous line. The cuffed, loose-fitting Flyshorts (\$114) in vibrant green can be stunningly sexy with a pair of heels or cute casually dressed down with flats. The playful white Shirred Cotton Short Chaisuit (\$214) cinches and ties at the thigh with dainty buttons down the front. It isn't the easiest piece to wear, but is perfect for those with leg to spare.

The spring collection is highly conceptual, with intricate detailing, darts and unconventional cinching. Hengst, a vintage buyer who now splits her time between New York and San Francisco, always pulls inspiration from eras past. "This season's line is very inventive, modern but with a vintage edge," says Betsy Backlund, assistant designer and manager of House of Hengst, the designer's atelier on Valencia Street. "It's really elegant, but not fancy," Backlund says, referring to pieces like the button-down Freshdress (\$189) with cap sleeves and a stand collar that can be dressed up or down to fit your mood. Every piece is made from cotton, silk or a blend of the two and the colors pop with deep reds, greens and browns mixed with whites and creams.

FASHION BY SUSAN HENGST
PHOTO BY JEFFERY JONESYugala Priti and
Priya Saraswati in
the Saffron Rare
Threads studio.

Priya Saraswati and Yugala Priti

Priya Saraswati and Yugala Priti are the duo behind Saffron Rare Threads, a line that offers professional attire beyond sensible suits and separates. One part jet-setter, one part corporate and one part happy hour, their pieces slide easily from the meeting room to the cocktail lounge.

Inspired by '70s Mediterranean cosmopolitans, Saffron's spring collection has punches of bold color and a theme of versatility like the Jayati jacket (\$250), a military-inspired belted blazer with short cuffed sleeves and contrast piping that can be paired with the a-line Esha skirt (\$90), wide-legged Jeeva pants (\$150) or Kiran shorts (\$120). Saffron's version of the oh-so-hot item is a cuffed gaucho that stops just above the knee. Caught by the bug, this is Saffron's first collection to include a dress. The Aditi (\$135) is an off-the-shoulder stretch satin number with a flared skirt while the Bharati (\$110) is a slim-fitting v-neck that comes to the knee. Vibrant turquoise and orange pieces liven up their line, which boasts natural accents like dyed coconut-shell buttons.

Saraswati, 30, and Priti, 33, met several years ago at A Motion Studios, a workspace for up-and-coming designers, and are preparing to celebrate Saffron's two-year anniversary with the April opening of their new studio and showroom on 17th Street in the Mission. Saffron was one of the local lines featured at last year's San Francisco Fashion week, another example of the city's flourishing style scene. "There are so many talented and individual designers here. It's nice that people are finally taking notice," says Priti. "It's happening slowly," adds Saraswati. "But it's happening."

"We definitely try to help each other out," Saraswati says of the burgeoning community. "We're all one big family," laughs Priti. "No 'Project Runway' cattiness over here," Saraswati adds.

Deirdre O'Boyle and Stacy Rodgers

She-Bible is another San Francisco-based line that is growing to meet demand. Deirdre O'Boyle and Stacy Rodgers, both 29, have expanded their line from graphic-oriented American Apparel printed tees to hand-cut offerings with an emphasis on shape. "We were finding that the T-shirt market was satu-



Stacy Rodgers and Deldra O'Boyle of She-Bible at the drawing table.

rated," O'Boyle says of their shift in focus. "If we were going to continue to do this, we needed to be more dynamic."

The Bay Area natives, who've been best friends since they were 16, decided to combine their creative backgrounds to launch She-Bible in 2003. What started with a screen press in their kitchen has become a full-fledged business warranting a recent move into their Mission studio space that's lined with rolls of fabric and centered around a huge cutting table.

Their spring collection is marked by comfy, wearable cotton blends in simple, yet flattering styles with a playful nautical theme that runs throughout. The must-have Bon Voyage dress (\$115) comes in a bold turquoise with yellow accent or vibrant red with a pink accent. A cinched waist, spaghetti straps and a flirty fit make it the perfect piece for the back deck at a weekend barbecue. Staying true to their roots, it comes with a matching screen-printed scarf. For a look that's a little rock 'n' roll, go for the mini-black dress (\$106) with its fitted waist, cowl neckline and short hem and pair it with grey leggings (\$42) screen-printed with tiny black airplanes. "We pull really long days, so that's the first thing on our mind: is this going to last? Is this going to wash well?" O'Boyle says of their inspiration. "We also like to have things that you can eat in!" laughs Rogers, noting the stretchy fabrics and high waistlines of most of their pieces.

Kate Logan

"This season marks the comeback of the dress," says Kate Logan, owner of North Beach boutique Ooma. "It's a little bit more feminine, more sexy." Logan carries a number of local lines and says she doesn't see San Francisco designers jumping at trends or chasing fleeting fashions. "We've got more of a 'timeless style' type of city, and I think the designers reflect that philosophy," Logan says.

Forget Paris and Milan. With the wealth of talent and style these designing women offer, Bay Area fashionistas simply have to shop San Francisco for sexy and sophisticated styles, perfect for spring.

Saffron Rare Threads

Ideale
1600 Haight St.
415-431-8836

Mingle
1815 Union St.
415-674-8811

Ooma

1422 Grant Ave.
415-627-6963

R.A.G.

541 Octavia St.
415-621-7718

She-Bible

Candystore
3153 16th St.
San Francisco
415-863-8143

Pixie
1400 Grant Ave.
415-392-1090

Picnic
1808 Polk St.
415-346-6556

House of Hengst

924 Valencia St.
415-642-0841

ACCENTS TO SPRING FOR

You may be dressed to the nines, but without these necessary accessories, you're only halfway there. Spectacular style is all in the details.



Spring afternoons are ripe with adventure and a girl must be prepared for anything. The Dutchy Nana Doc carry-all, (\$231-\$262) made of the softest leather from Doe (629a Haight St., SF; 415-558-8588 and www.dutchy.net), comes in three sizes to meet all your on-the-go needs.



Don't let spring showers dampen your sense of style. Stay dry with a sweetly sophisticated Pare umbrella (\$48) from Abigail Morgan (1640 Union St., SF; 415-567-1779 and www.pareumbrella.com). Our favorite is the citi leaf design, but any of the simple, retro styles will brighten your day and your outfit.



Banish bad hair with a vintage-inspired, wide cloth headband (\$24) handmade by local craft outfit Cookie and the Dude. The colorful ensemble-toppers are selling like hotcakes at Ooma (1422 Grant Ave., SF; 415-627-6963 and www.cookieandthedude.com).



Get your limbs ready for baring with Lalicious body sugar soufflé scrub in coconut cream (\$32). Coconut oil moisturizes while pure cane sugar crystals exfoliate, leaving your skin soft, smooth and sweet smelling. Available at Pure Beauty (2124 Fillmore St., SF; 415-346-2511 and www.lalicious.com).



Spring's sense of renewal can make even the busiest fashionista wistful. Take time to muse and reflect with local artist Sabrina Ward Harrison's "The True and the Questions" (\$16.95), an art-filled journal published by Chronicle Books (101 Fourth St.; 415-369-6271 and www.chroniclebooks.com) meant to inspire and encourage.



Spring cleaning's not just for your closet, it applies to your make-up bag too. After you toss out the old but before you purchase the new, peruse Paula Begoun's make-up maven's handbook "Don't Go to the Cosmetics Counter Without Me" (\$27.95), a run-down of virtually every product on the market from mascaras to moisturizers, available at Cody's Books (2 Stockton St., SF; 415-773-0444 and www.codysbooks.com).