

MADE IN AMERICA

Made in USA: A Plan and a Passion

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designers such as Duckie Brown, The Row, Zac Posen and Oscar de la Renta.

Melina Manko and Lindsay Mann, Fashion Institute of Technology graduates, design Kotoba using Shima Seiki's whole garment machinery.

Whole body technology is eco friendly because there's less waste and it's less labor intensive, said Mann.

Kotoba is produced in a most unfactorylike factory, Mann said.

There's floor to ceiling windows and plants everywhere. One of the advantages of whole garment technology is the absence of seams. Pieces are less likely to fall apart, as seams are the weakest point of a garment, she added.

Susan Young, vice president of manufacturing at Eileen Fisher, said that the company produces about 18 percent in the U.S., with 800,000 units produced in the U.S., primarily in New York City for cut and sew jersey and novelty knits, with denim and sweaters made in Los Angeles.

We have a strong commitment to Made in the USA, Young said.

Making denim in Los Angeles is more expensive, but Eileen Fisher designers were interested in the local denim scene.

We can cope with the prices and the quality is excellent, Young said.

We're looking to bring more into the U.S. and diminish some of our production in China.

OUT WEST

On the West Coast, Monique Lhuillier, the high end bridal and ready to wear designer, owns her own factory in downtown Los Angeles, where she employs 165 artisans. Lhuillier does about

70 to 80 percent of her production there. She built the 360,000 square foot factory seven years ago.

One of the benefits is you're constantly touching the product, seeing how it's progressing, she said. I can actually see it in stages, so I can change my mind, and it can morph into other things. It's really a luxury to have. I feel like the only way to do it right is in house. It is an expensive proposition. I understand why less people do it, but for my product and my brand, it's the only way [at the collection level]. I love keeping jobs here in this country.

David Meister has been producing his line, David Meister Collection, in the U.S. for the past 15 years, with 90 percent made in Los Angeles. The Signature collection, which is four and a half years old, is also entirely produced there.

The sewers I have do beautiful work, he said. Where you need the Orient and India is when you're doing intricate beading and embroidery. As far as the quality of the construction of the garment [here], it's amazing. I'm a control freak, and you can control the quality so much better when the factories are a few miles away. Our QC is in there every day. I don't see any downside to producing here. People do appreciate Made in the USA. I'm out at a lot of stores, at trunk shows and events, and when you tell people that, you really get a reaction. They'll clap.

Jeff Rudes, founder and ceo of J Brand, said the company produces all of its denim in Los Angeles.

Premium denim is usually produced in L.A. It's the stamp of quality, Rudes said. We've got the laundries, we've got workers, we've got the intelligence and the technicians and the de-

A David Meister dress.



velopment here.

J Brand uses a combination of domestic (Cone Mills), European and Japanese fabrics. One of the factories is in J Brand's building, which works exclusively for the company and makes 25,000 jeans a week. The firm also contracts its production to about five other factories. Speed to market is important.

When you're a leader and developing a new fabric or new product, we want it in the stores fast, said Rudes, noting that can be as little as two weeks.

Rudes also feels he's able to get a well trained work force because it's Made in America—the label says Made in California, U.S.A.—and there's a high minimum wage. If you can afford the cost, it's the place to make denim in America.

American Apparel employs over 12,000 people worldwide, with most of those jobs in the U.S., the company said.

Every garment we sell is manufactured in the U.S., the vast majority at our vertically integrated headquarters in downtown Los Angeles, a spokesman said. We feel that by doing our manufacturing in the United States, we can not only more effectively control the quality of our product, but we can actually know the faces of our workers and treat them right and fairly.

OTHER REGIONS

With eight factories in North America, Individualized Apparel Group bills itself as the largest manufacturer of high end men's apparel in the U.S. The plants, which range from Oxxford's facility in Chicago to Gitman shirt's plant in Ashland, Pa., and the Individualized Shirt factory in Perth Amboy, N.J., produce more than 375 million garments annually.

Joe Blair, IAG's president, believes the company has been able to continue to produce domestically since its founding in 1968 in large part because 85 percent of what it manufactures is either luxury or custom merchandise.

And it's our heritage, he said. It's not in our mind set to manufacture anywhere else.

IAG employs 3,500 workers in its factories and maintains an excellent relationship with the unions. That's a real advantage to manufacturing in America, he said, noting that the plants can turn a custom made men's suit in 10 days or less. You can't do

that in China.

He said that the recent trend among American consumers to embrace domestic manufacturing has also worked to the company's advantage. It's really struck a chord with consumers.

Blair said he doesn't expect the Made in America phenomena to fade anytime soon, adding, I hope it's not a phase. There's nothing more real than keeping jobs at home.

Blair noted that he has also seen the rise of artisan domestic manufacturing for the first time in many years.

We're seeing start ups in weaving and manufacturing in Brooklyn [N.Y.], the South and California, Blair said. I believe we've turned a corner and customers and competitors are moving in this direction. We continue to grow by double digits every year, and we're not in a defensive posture. We're in a growth mode, and we'd like to see more of it.

Sarah and Victor Lytvinnenko, co-founders and designers of Raleigh Denim Workshop, produce everything in North Carolina, New York and Los Angeles. Victor Lytvinnenko explained that he bought sewing machines on eBay and Craigslist from some factories that had closed in North Carolina.

Two mechanics from a Levi's mill taught me how to fix the machines, he said.

The factories produce 300 pairs of men's and women's jeans a week that retail from \$200 to \$350. They employ 27 people in Raleigh who hand stamp the edition number on every pair. The label reads, Handcrafted by non-automated jeansmiths in Raleigh, N.C." The pattern maker is a 79-year-old former Levi's pattern maker. This

85%

SHARE OF RESPONDENTS FROM AN ALLIANCE OF AMERICAN MANUFACTURING SURVIVORS OF LOCAL COMPANIES WOULD GO ABROAD FOR LOCAL JOBS IN THE U.S.

year, Raleigh contracted to facilities in New York City and Los Angeles for their extra production. Raleigh sells to Barneys New York, Saks Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom and about 50 to 60 smaller boutiques. The company also makes outerwear, shirts and dresses.

Sofibella Wear launched more than three years ago and is committed to producing entirely in the U.S. The family owned company opened a 12,000 square foot manufacturing facility in Pompano Beach, Fla., that uses state of the art technology to produce fitness apparel. It also uses all performance fabrics that are made in the U.S.

According to Franco Forcella, founder and president, the company buys from California mills, with 92 percent of its fabrics made domestically. Most of the fabrics are Tactel nylon and Lycra spandex. The company's factory has 75 machines, and the entire cutting room is automated. It employs 45 people.

The advantage of producing in the U.S. is time, Forcella said. You get to market a lot faster, and your inventory levels are controlled. It's a safe way to gain market share. He acknowledged that he has to price his line 30 percent and 45 percent higher than if it was produced in Central America and Asia, respectively.

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM EAN. E. ALMIERI AND ARTHUR FRIEDMAN

An activewear look from Sofibella.

