

New Direction: People Like Frank

Emil Rutenberg Corporation's product line is founded in impeccably tailored, innovatively styled jackets. For more than two decades, it has been the linchpin of the Emil Rutenberg Collection of womenswear. Sold at specialty stores and upscale designer floors of the likes of Nordstrom, the Rutenberg novelty jackets have attracted an unswervingly loyal following that appreciates the exquisite cut and fit as well as Emil Rutenberg's canny eye for fabric and clean cut styling.

After 23 years, Rutenberg's vision has expanded to include a newer audience. "We came up with," he explains, "a much more directional, diverse, youthful collection."

And so began People Like Frank, comprising of a "seasonless collection" of sportswear, dresses, separates, and outerwear that embodies, says Rutenberg, "the quality of a true designer line, but at a volume price point." Wholesale price points range from \$85 to \$450 for a full-length butter suede trench coat. People Like Frank launched last year in upscale specialty stores, and, Rutenberg reports, "We've literally had sales multiply month by month at quite an extraordinary growth rate!"

People Like Frank is a true contemporary line designed for a young woman's body, with sizes ranging from 0 to 14. But beyond fit, the approach is distinctively unique.

"Because this division belongs to a well-established tailored-jacket business," says Rutenberg, "quality has been paramount in producing this line." Styles and price points target ageless women with an eye for style that departs from convention.

Under the supervision of designer Fiorella Chlodnik, the "signature" of the line is its extensive detailing, all done in-house. "We do a lot of handwork, and that is what is separating us from everyone else," says Chlodnik. The work includes appliques, hand printing, and hand embroidery. "This is not glitzy, it is not country crafting, but urbanized, nuanced and subtle," Rutenberg explains. Along with the handwork are special details echoing those of fine designer lines—hand wrinkling; real horn, wood, stone and coconut buttons; and novelty linings. People like Frank is introducing paper thin Italian leather that drapes and stitches like fabric and feels ultra soft. "The finish is of true designer quality," Chlodnik says.

An example is one jacket that retailers cannot keep on their racks—the much-loved Number 4494. The solid black rayon tailored jacket features a black-and-ivory striped lining that peplums down from the jacket bottom to give the illusion of the jacket being worn over a striped silk shirt. Completing the look, and somewhat in contrast, the jacket's back is strewn with elaborate flowers that are hand-stitched petal by petal.

This marriage of the masculine with the ultra-feminine is emblematic of the harmonious collaboration of Rutenberg and

Chlodnik. "My taste is more the menswear look," Rutenberg says. "But Fiorella is great with detail, and adept at adding a strong feminine touch to what we do. Our natural balance works well."

People Like Frank is currently offering Resort and Spring I and II, but every month, a few more complementary pieces are added, "to keep it fresh," Rutenberg explains. "We give our clients constant newness, which is why, I believe, the volume has come to us so quickly," Rutenberg says. Fabrics come from all over the world, with most from Europe, but everything is manufactured and finished in Los Angeles.

Quality, fit, innovation, forward styling, and craftsmanship...As if Rutenberg's newest endeavor needs

anything else to distinguish it, there is, of course, the name. "Frank is just a name that came to mind," the engaging South African explains. "It was anybody's name, it had some charm to it. Instead of a single word, we thought we'd give everybody a sentence—originally, it was Clothes for People Like Frank. That didn't quite work on the label, so we ended up with People Like Frank. It's a square, bold label that works graphically quite well. It raises the question, who is Frank? And do they actually like him?"

The answer appears to be a resounding yes. ☛

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PEOPLE LIKE FRANK

