

Fashion designer Seema Sudan moved to New Orleans in October 2007 and introduced liaMolly, a knitwear line, in February.



# Style Central

Designer sees fashion industry potential in N.O.

By **Emilie Bahr**  
Staff Writer  
emilie.bahr@nopeg.com

CLOTHING DESIGNER SEEMA SUDAN'S latest collection is brighter and more modern than her previous offerings, noted for their subdued palettes and vintage feel.

The change of pace is less a factor of the fluidity of fashion trends as it is a testament to Sudan's current inspirations. She has taken her cues most recently from sources ranging from New Orleans' Mardi Gras Indians to Prospect 1, the citywide contemporary art exhibition that opened last month.

A place better known for characters than couture, New Orleans might not on the surface seem the most obvious choice for a start-up clothing company. But Sudan, who moved to New Orleans with her husband and children in October 2007, finds in the Crescent City a muse and the makings of a design center.

See **STYLE**, page 44

## Items sold nationally

### STYLE

continued from page 1

"I have never been so inspired by a city. The environment here is so rich creatively for an artist and for small businesses," said the 38-year-old creator of liaMolly, a knitwear line introduced in February and named for her children, Liam, 4, and Molly, 11.

"Look at Prospect 1 and all the artists in the Bywater," Sudan said. "The taste level is pretty big here. It really reminds me of Montreal mixed with New York. It's got the cafe culture."

"New Orleans is sort of like Williamsburg," Sudan's husband, Sidney Bertheaud, interjected, referring to the Brooklyn neighborhood that has long been a draw for immigrants and artists. "Except Williamsburg is not nearly as attractive."

Aesthetics aside, Sudan and Bertheaud say they have also found a level of support and encouragement in New Orleans that has fed

their business's success.

"The feel that everybody wants you to do well is so nice," Sudan said. "It'd be much harder to do this in New York," Bertheaud said. In New York, he said, "Everybody's always telling you 'no.'"

Sudan was born in Montreal to German and Indian parents. Her stepmother taught her to knit when she was 9 years old. After high school in Nashville, Sudan moved to New York to attend Parsons, the acclaimed design institute of The New School.

She went on to design for Liz Claiborne and Calvin Klein's CK division and later tried her hand at boutique ownership in Brooklyn. Eventually, Sudan accepted a job with Philadelphia-based women's clothing company Anthropologie, where she was chief knitwear designer until about three years ago.

When Hurricane Katrina struck, Sudan said she and her husband felt the need to come to New Orleans.

Bertheaud is a Louisiana native whose family hails from the Lafayette area. He spent his college years in New Orleans and with his brother owns Uptown rental properties that were damaged by the storm. He'd been spending significant time in the city, getting things back in order, when his family decided to follow.

"I was a little nervous about New Orleans, for sure," said Sudan, who initially figured the move would be a "sabbatical," allowing for a



Seema Sudan's new knitwear line, liaMolly, which was introduced in February, has generated \$518,000 in revenue.

### liaMolly fashion facts

**Designer:** Seema Sudan  
**Launched:** February  
**Headquarters:** New Orleans  
**Showrooms:** Los Angeles and New York  
**Employees:** three full-time — Sudan, her husband, Sidney Bertheaud, and Rachel Bourgeois  
**Web site:** www.liamolly.com

Source: CityBusiness staff research

break from her travel-intensive job and more time with her children. But Sudan took quickly to the city. Months after moving, she started her clothing company.

Launched on a \$75,000 investment and help from overseas manufacturers with whom she had grown acquainted through her work with Anthropologie, liaMolly's inaugural line did remarkably well.

The label generated a profit on its first collection — \$209,000 on \$518,000 in revenue, according to Sudan — and rave reviews. A grow-



Fashion designer Seema Sudan says New Orleans has provided her with support and encouragement, adding that the city has the makings of a design center.

ing stack of press includes mentions in national magazines Inc., Bust and Lucky, which named Sudan among the best new designers this fall.

Her designs are sold in about 100 boutiques nationally and at Bloomingdale's and Anthropologie, which featured liaMolly on its October catalogue cover.

Sudan expects revenue of about \$1.3 million from her spring line.

Carolyn Billet ordered three designs from the company's first collection for her Maple Street boutique, Gae-Tana's.

"They were a little higher than what we carry ordinarily," Billet said of the sweaters, which retail for about

\$100 to \$225. "But they were very interesting and offbeat enough to fit in with what we do."

The sweaters were a hit at the store, said Billet, whose supply was quickly exhausted. She plans to check out Sudan's latest collection on her buying trip next month.

Sudan looks forward to expanding liaMolly's presence in New Orleans and throughout the South. Knitwear may not seem the most logical choice for the regional climate, but she points out that many of her pieces are lightweight. Besides, she added, noting a southern penchant for heavy-duty air conditioning in summer, "I wear more sweaters here all year round."

Sudan also wants to start selling pieces on her Web site, www.liamolly.com. And she'd like to open a retail store, though her first-hand knowledge of the demands of that business will likely keep those plans from taking shape for some time.

Meanwhile, she is always hunting for her next creative spark, which is never far away.

"The talent that you have here," Sudan said, "it's like, who's gonna inspire us next?"

>featuring liaMolly & Seema Sudan

New Orleans  
**CityBusiness**  
THE BUSINESS NEWSPAPER OF METROPOLITAN NEW ORLEANS  
\$2.00  
DECEMBER 8, 2008

press  
New Orleans  
City Business  
Dec 08