

# WWD WEDNESDAY

Sportswear

## Killer Chic

The fall collection Nicolas Ghesquière showed for Balenciaga on Tuesday showcased his stunning cuts, sculpted or seamed in highly distinctive ways. Here, an off-the-shoulder dress in a sharp, sexy shape that zooms around dangerous curves, worn with a diamanté parure. For more on the season, see pages 4 to 10.

### Counterfeit Crackdown: New York Police Shutter Canal Street Buildings

By Ross Tucker

**NEW YORK** — The Counterfeit Triangle has been flattened.

A collection of buildings in Chinatown occupying a city block and operating as a virtual mall for counterfeit goods was raided by New York City police officers Tuesday morning, resulting in the seizure of more than \$1 million in knockoff accessories and fragrances bearing some of the fashion industry's best-known labels, including Prada, Fendi, Coach, Rolex, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, Burberry, Calvin Klein — and even Dora the Explorer.

The three raided buildings comprised  
See **Counterfeit**, Page 11





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“Women want to be able to hold onto their personal style and not give that up when they become pregnant, they still want to look great.

– *Krista K. Meyers,*  
*owner Krista K Maternity + Baby*

# maternity wear prepares to reclaim its turf

Maternal America

**F**or four long seasons, the maternity wear category has watched as ready-to-wear has glorified the empire waist, the baby-doll dress and the tunic. The popularity of such styles has not been good news for maternity wear manufacturers and retailers. “What it’s meant,” said Kim Preis, founder and president of Samson Martin, “is that customers come into the stores a lot later in their pregnancy because they can

stretch their own wardrobe for a lot longer with these styles.”

Considering that a woman’s need for maternity wear is only nine months to begin with, shopping “a lot later” can have a serious impact on the category’s bottom line. But savvy manufacturers and retailers are weathering this trend. How? With creativity, a focus on what women want and a reasonably well-founded hope that the baby-doll trend has just about run its course. ▶



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# satisfy the cravings

At Samson Martin, sales have been good despite the baby-doll trend because the foundation of the line is the "due in" T-shirt. For the uninitiated, "due in" T-shirts allow moms-to-be to announce, without saying a word, the month their baby is expected to arrive. Preis doesn't claim she came up with the idea knowing it would be such a big hit. "I'm fashion-obsessed and I was starting to get nervous, even before I got pregnant, about what I was going to wear that would be cute and stylish. The first question everyone asks is 'when are you due?' So, it just seemed like a logical idea to make tops that let women answer the question. I had no idea that the 'due in' concept would take off so quickly."

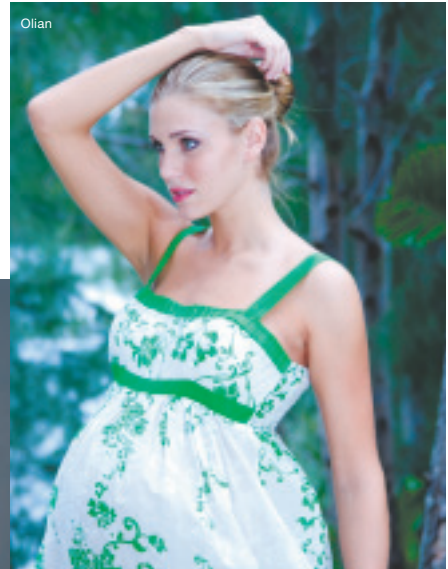
At \$38 for the tank top and \$56 for the long-sleeve version, the price is right for a wide range of women. The shirts have also become a popular gift item. Preis credits the "novelty" of her products with insulating her business and helping it to grow both domestically and internationally. "Buyers in Singapore, Russia, Iceland and the Netherlands have come to me. I think it's a lot harder for them to find really fun and on-trend maternity clothes. When they find my stuff, they buy it like gangbusters."

Novelty of a different sort has meant success for Glamourmom as well. Founded by then-new mom Line Rothman in 2000, Glamourmom makes what is actually a post-maternity garment: a patented nursing bra tank that looks like a regular tank top but provides nursing moms with full support, easy access and discretion for their post-partum bellies. Like Preis, Rothman's brainstorm came from her own personal experience – an angle you hear frequently among maternity manufacturers and retailers alike. Rothman searched everywhere for a nursing top that she could wear beneath her pre-pregnancy shirts as her shape returned. Finding nothing, she designed what she couldn't find on the market. She loved it and thought other nursing mothers would as well. "Moms appreciate that it looks like the clothing they wore before they got pregnant. It's not like nursing wear. It doesn't look weird. It looks like the clothing that's in the stores."

Without question, coming up with an idea that no one's had before is a



Glamourmom



Olian



Samson Martin

critical component in achieving success, but equally important is understanding that as much as a woman's body changes during pregnancy, her desire to be herself doesn't. "Women want to be able to hold onto their personal style and not give that up when they become pregnant," said Krista Kaur Meyers, owner of the Krista K Boutique in Chicago. "They still want to look great. Whatever their personal style is, they want to be able to keep it."

Keeping their pre-pregnancy personal style has never been easier for expectant moms – and not just because baby-doll styles can hide growing bellies. Until recently, maternity styles tended to lag behind ready-to-wear by six months to a year, but that gap is shrinking according to Song Pardue, founder of the Pickles & Ice Cream chain of maternity stores throughout the southeast. That could be, in part, because more ready-to-wear companies are launching their own maternity lines. This has been especially true in the premium denim category where Citizens of Humanity has their own maternity line as does Paige Jeans, Chip & Pepper and, beginning in March, James Jeans.

The higher price points – around \$200 – of premium jeans have not dissuaded soon-to-be moms, in part, according to Meyers of Krista K, "because people will wear them to death. Also, our customer, if she wears Paige jeans when she's not pregnant, she wants to wear Paige when she is. We tried carrying lower priced denim, too, but it didn't sell."

Pardue of Pickles & Cream confirms this: "Designer jeans continue to sell like crazy. They're more than a basic; they're a staple. It's not even a splurge anymore. People are just buying them."

At Belly Dance Maternity's three stores – in Chicago, Highland Park, Ill and New York's trendy West Village – "designer jeans and basics continue to sell," according to Owner Jennifer Strom Simonte, although Belly Dance has had success with jeans and pants below \$100 as well.

Samson Martin's Preis thinks "you can't lose with basic T-shirts when you're pregnant. You feel good in them. You don't feel like you're wearing screaming maternity wear. You feel as normal as you can feel. It's really important for maternity stores to offer women basic fun pieces they can pair with jeans and feel great in when, in truth, they're not feeling so stylish and great." ▶



## ONE-STOP SHOPPING FOR THE TRADE

Although the maternity wear sector has had to face the challenge of competition from ready-to-wear for the past two years, the industry gained a significant helping hand with the launch of the MOM2B Trade Show in January of last year.

The only one of its kind, this trade-only show gives designers and manufacturers a direct platform to showcase their wares to potential buyers from across the country and around the world. Following the debut event's success, the show's founders staged a second show last fall and will host the third one March 3-4 at the Las Vegas Hilton.

Amy DeCamillis, MOM2B's president, said the show, originated in Los Angeles, but changed venues this year to accommodate both exhibitors and buyers who find it easier to fly in and out of Las Vegas. Next month's show will feature approximately 120 exhibitors. That's on par with the last show, but up about 40% from the debut show. Buyer attendance is expected to be up as well, reflecting the new location, with about 400 people representing 225 stores.

While the product mix at past shows was about 50/50 apparel/non-apparel, DeCamillis reported that the mix at next month's show has shifted to about 60/40.

Although some things have changed, for Cynthia Cervini, one of the MOM2B partners, the show's "goals have remained constant from the outset: strengthen the maternity industry as a whole by bringing the community together twice a year and make buying an effortless experience for attendees."

# A New View Maternity

EXPECT THE BEST

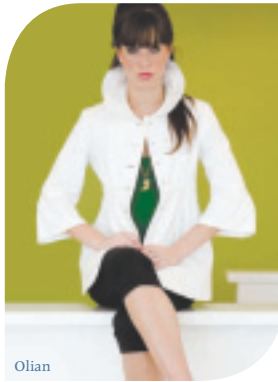


Japanese Weekend

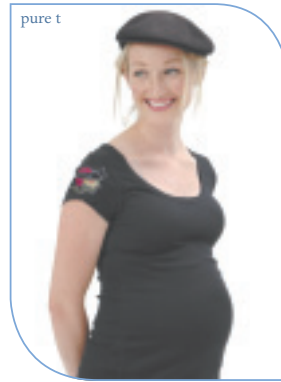
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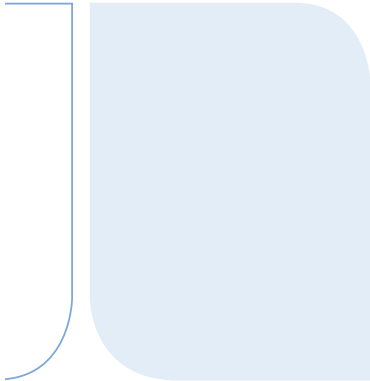
Maternal America



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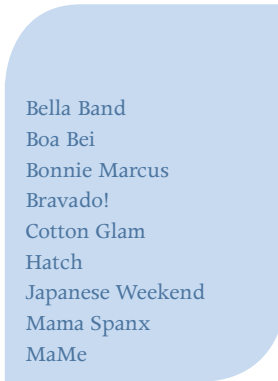
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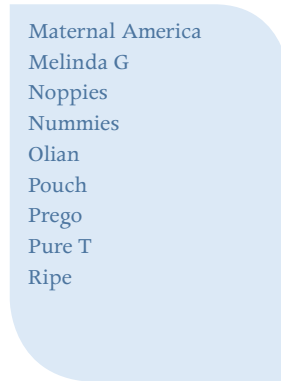
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# what's next



Olian

Although many manufacturers and retailers have succeeded despite the competition from ready-to-wear, everyone will be glad when the trend ends and many feel that time has come. Amarda Texidor, president of A New View Maternity, a company that reps 18 manufacturers, is cautiously optimistic and sees hope in runway looks that "were a little different at Fashion Week. They were showing a lot of belts and cinching at the waist. Since a pregnant gal loses her waist almost immediately there's no way she can follow that style."

**Song Pardue agrees: "Look at what the fashion magazines are starting to hint at for fall. The tunic is still in, but it's becoming more structured. People are still doing leggings and skinny jeans, but with tops that are more slimming. Fall fashions are inspired by menswear and that's good news for maternity because you can't buy the tailored look at Banana Republic and wear it through nine months of pregnancy."**

In terms of how maternity wear will follow the ready-to-wear styles, Texidor of A New View Maternity said "fall will be kind of dark, with lots of jackets, a lot of shirting, serious clothing that reflects the temperament of the country, which is let's get down to business, work hard, make money, figure out problems. I think you'll see a lot of power dressing although I don't necessarily mean suits." The colors Texidor sees for fall include grays, a range of greens from avocado to forest, heathers, plums and aubergine.

In Texidor's view, maternity is "a bottoms business. Pants will continue to be very important with everything from skinny leg to completely wide leg with a moderate leg for working women." But, as important as she sees pants for pregnant women, Texidor also thinks dresses will remain strong for fall.

Suits will be part of the fall collection at Maternal America, which is based in Los Angeles. Natalie Ngo, the company's designer and co-owner said "we're put-



Belly Dance Maternity

## Satisfying the Pregnant Shopper

Successful maternity retailers understand how their customer is different from the non-pregnant shopper and how she's just the same

**Store:** Pickles & Ice Cream

**Where:** Dallas, Plano, Tex. and seven other locations

**Who:** Song Pardue, founder & CEO

**The philosophy:** I think what makes our stores so special and different from others is our approach to customer service. We never push items that don't flatter and we wardrobe our mommies according to both their personal style and their lifestyle needs. I think women appreciate our laidback 'girlfriend-to-girlfriend' approach. Our goal is to gain customers rather than to make sales. We believe that sales naturally follow excellent service.



Pickles & Ice Cream

**Store:** Belly Dance Maternity

**Where:** New York City, Chicago, Highland Park, Ill.

**Who:** Jennifer Strom Simonte, owner

**The philosophy:** We have a solid understanding of what our customer is looking for because we listen to her. She is very comfortable with her sense of style and doesn't want to give that up when she's pregnant. We also have a very strong knowledge base about fit and we have a lot of exclusive relationships with designers with whom we work closely to bring the most fashionable clothes to the market.

**Store:** Krista K Maternity + Baby

**Where:** Chicago

**Who:** Krista Kaur Meyers, owner

**The philosophy:** We offer our customers a consulting service that shows them how to mix and match pieces so that they end up with a complete, versatile maternity wardrobe made up of items that can be worn multiple ways. We also help customers understand how to wear the various pieces throughout their pregnancy as their bodies grow and as the seasons change as well as post-pregnancy as they return to their pre-pregnancy shape.



Krista K Maternity + Baby

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# Samson Martin

## When are you due?



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ting a career group together for the first time in response to feedback we got from our reps. A woman wants to look the way she did before she got pregnant and we want to help her achieve that." Maternal America will also offer lots of prints, including tribal prints and floral prints. For the most part, the line's colors will be dark, but there will be some jewel tones.

In addition to both wide-leg and tapered pants in standard sizes, Maternal America will be showing pants in petite this season, including jeans. "Our petites are truly sized for petites," Ngo reported. "They're not just 34" inseams that are cut off. We size them so the knee is in the right place." The fall collection will also include "lots of dresses" and a fur capelet "for fun."

At Glamourmom, new styles will include tops with sleeves and new colors such as plum and silver gray. Rothman reported "everything has a toned-down look, we're offering muted colors that work for layering."

In extending her line, Preis at Samson Martin is "leaning toward vintage fabrics, distressed looks, soft and stretchy, yet form-fitting, so that women want to grab it and have it be the first thing they put on."

For Lili Del Cueto, president and head designer of Olian, a fashion-oriented maternity wear maker in Miami, fall fashions will include lined tailored jackets in wool and dresses and tops in jewel tones and bold prints – especially animal prints. "All our merchandise is form-fitting," Del cueto reported. In a switch on pregnant women wearing ready-to-wear, Del cueto said that many non-pregnant women buy her designs and love them. "We cater to comfort and fit for pregnant women," said Del Cueto, "but we're a fashion house and people respond to that."

New colors and styles will be part of San Francisco-based Japanese Weekend's fall collection as well, but Founder-President-Head Designer Barbie White is particularly enthusiastic about a cotton-seaweed blend that will be part of the firm's San Francisco collection this fall. "We very much want the elements of the fabrics we use to be easily renewable resources. The cotton-seaweed blend will complement the bamboo we've been using for some time."

Also part of the fall collection will be groupings in solids and prints that are designed so a consumer can buy five pieces and, from those five pieces, make 15 different outfits. One piece, a short halter evening dress, turns into a skirt that can be mixed with a variety of tops. "A pregnant woman is only buying clothes for about six months so our goal is to give her more value by offering clothing that's convertible. She could wear the same thing two days in a row and no one would know," said White, whose company manufactures virtually their entire collection in San Francisco.

There's no question that maternity wear designers, manufacturers and retailers have been frustrated by the trends in ready-to-wear that have cut into their business in recent seasons. But they take heart that no trend lasts forever – especially in fashion. Even more importantly, they're confident they understand their customer, they're committed to giving her what she wants and they're optimistic about the future. Given the personal story behind so many maternity wear companies, it's easy to understand why. For many in the industry, maternity wear is more than just a business, it's a labor of love. ■



Olian

Maternal America

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Japanese Weekend