

# FASHION ARRIVES

A showcase for local designers aims to put Tampa Bay on the fashion world's map.

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Fashionwise, Tampa Bay can't compete with New York City. No one's saying it can.

But this town is home to some talented designers, and local shopaholics want them to stick around. So Wednesday through Saturday brings the first Fashion Week Tampa Bay, a series of events inspired by the festivities held in New York and other style meccas. The goal is to showcase local designers and encourage them to expand business here.

"New York may be the fashion capital or whatever, but not everybody wants to necessarily move to New York," said Nancy Vaughn, executive producer and senior event publicist of Fashion Week Tampa Bay.

A fan of boutiques in Hyde Park, Vaughn, 32, of New Tampa, realized many local designers are too busy to market themselves. She began organizing Fashion Week in 2007 with help from co-organizers Charlene McPherson, Sarah Combs, Aria Broxton and dozens of volunteers. All proceeds will benefit the YWCA and Best Buddies, a group that finds work and companionship for people with special needs.

Although New York's semi-annual Fashion Week is the crown jewel, similar festivals have popped up in cities like Charleston, Nashville, Cleveland and Detroit.

"I've heard, too, with the cost of travel and the way that our current economy is going, that regional shows are going to probably pay a bigger role — because there are local buyers here," Vaughn said.

Fashion Week Tampa Bay will feature creations from 12 designers — some local, others with ties to the area.

Francisco Azucar, who attended Tampa's International Academy of Design and Technology, spent two decades here, designing clothes and Gasparilla costumes. A few years ago he went to Miami for surgery and decided to stay. He found that South Florida offered "a lot more opportunities as far as people who love what I do, people who love my clothes."

In Tampa Bay, fashion was just a part-time job for Azucar. In Miami, on the other hand, he works full-time designing for Spanish-language soap opera stars and "ladies of society," he said. Regular networking events allow designers, models and photographers to meet and refer each other for jobs.

"Once you get known in the community, they just keep calling you," said Azucar, 44, who's working on wardrobes for an independent film. He says fashionistas in Tampa Bay need to step up their networking game in person and on sites like ModelMayhem.com, which connects folks in the industry.

Azucar's experience is common. Only 20 to 30 percent of fashion design graduates find jobs in Tampa Bay, according to IADT's career center. Fashion merchandising majors fare better: At least 50 percent of grads are placed in jobs in Tampa Bay, mostly in retail.

Vaughn plans to hold the event every fall and spring. She hopes to help local designers develop working relationships.

"When you bring people together, instead of having that competitive spirit, it can be collaborative in the fact that you're improving one another's game," Vaughn said. "If you don't attempt to do something in the city that you live in, then people will leave."

## Got a passion for fashion?

Support local designers — and a lot of great causes — by attending one of these upcoming shows.

### HIGH HEEL HIKE

On Saturday, strap on some stilettos and walk a 1K — that's less than a mile — around Hyde Park Village. Proceeds benefit breast cancer research and advocacy. \$25 includes a T-shirt. Registration is at 11 a.m. and the hike is at noon, followed around 12:15 p.m. by a fashion show by Kit's Well-Heeled & Well-Dressed. Call (813) 541-3248 or go to highheelhike.com.

### SURREAL FASHION

Tickets to this Salvador Dali fundraiser are \$60 and include an 11 a.m. reception followed by a noon luncheon and live auction. Sept. 23 at the St. Petersburg Yacht Club, 11 Central Ave., St. Petersburg. Call (727) 515-1212 or write to fordebra@aol.com.

Photo by Luis Santana/tbt\*

### THE PURSUIT OF SEXINESS

This one's hosted by... wait for it ... Fonzworth Bentley! The *From G's to Gents* fairy godfather will emcee a show featuring women's gowns and urban casual fashions for both sexes. Oct. 10 at Studio Inc. Night Club, 3603 W Waters Ave., Tampa. 10 p.m. Call (813) 935-5339.

### FALL/WINTER GODDESS FASHION SHOW

This seventh annual show features designs from a handful of local designers, including Bebe Ziegler. Oct. 22 at 7 p.m. at Hyde Park Cafe, 1806 West Platt St., Tampa. \$5. Ages 21 and up. Call (813) 254-2233 or go to thehydeparkcafe.com.

### NICOLE MILLER EVENING COLLECTION

Rub elbows with the designer at this event, Oct. 29 at Renaissance Vinoy Resort, 501 Fifth Ave. NE, Saint Petersburg. Reception is at 11 a.m. Fashion show and luncheon are at noon. \$75-\$150. Call (727) 896-2667 ext. 197.

### FASHIONISTAS FASHION SHOW

A benefit for the Focus on Females Women's Healthcare Symposium featuring fashions from Kit's Well-Heeled & Well-Dressed. It starts at 5 p.m. Nov. 8 at Kit's, 714 S Village Circle, Hyde Park. Tickets are \$175 and include a silent auction, buffet dinner, live auction and 8 p.m. fashion show, followed by a performance by Anita Pointer of the Pointer Sisters. Call (813) 250-9302 or go to focusonfemales.com/fashionistas.html.

### REBORN COUTURE FASHION SHOW

This eponymous show will feature collections from the South Howard Avenue store. Nov. 12 at 10 p.m. at The Kennedy, 2408 W Kennedy Blvd., Tampa. Ages 21 and older. Admission is free. Call (813) 259-9669 or go to thekennedysoho.com.



Design by Ivanka Ska

Design by Bebe Ziegler

Design by Robert Buck

Design by Essence Flowers

## Fashion Week Tampa Bay

For info on passes and VIP tickets, call (813) 994-9807 or visit fashionweektampabay.com.

**Sept. 24** 6 p.m. Cocktail reception, book signing by *Girls Getaway Guide* author Casey Wohl. Tampa Artist Emporium, 1618 Snow Ave., Hyde Park. Open only to VIP pass holders. Passes are \$100-\$150.

**Sept. 25** 7 p.m. Runway show, Fashion Week Tampa Bay Boutique. Ritz Ybor, 1503 E Seventh Ave., Ybor City. \$40-\$55.

**Sept. 26** Runway show and Fashion Week Tampa Bay Boutique The Coliseum, 535 Fourth Ave. N, St. Pete. \$40-\$55.

**Sept. 27** Fashion brunch, silent auction. Pacific Wave, 211 Second St. S, St. Pete. \$15-\$20.

## Design stars

Here's the 4-1-1 on a few of the local designers showcasing their work at Fashion Week Tampa Bay. (That's their work at far left.)

### Robert Buck, 28, Tampa

The Mobile, Ala., native runs Habari Clothing Company, featuring "upscale casual" menswear and unisex caps.

#### Fashion education:

Buck learned the ropes from his former business partner and his mother, who studied fashion.

#### Biggest challenge of working here:

"I think we have some great seamstresses, some great pattern makers. It's just that they primarily work inside their home, so it's kind of difficult to find them cause they're not listed. So you have to network to find them."

**Ever thought about leaving?** "No, definitely not. I'm a Southern boy to the heart, and I know we have a lot of talent here in the South."

**How Tampa Bay can become a fashion mecca:** Get celebs to wear locally designed clothes during the Super Bowl.

**Advice for designers:** Collaborate.

**On the Web:** myspace.com/habari clothing company

### Ivanka Ska, 37, St. Petersburg

The Polish native owns House of Ska, a women's boutique in downtown St. Pete.

**Fashion education:** Ska's parents taught her to sew.

**Biggest challenge of working here:** "Supporting local artists is still a new concept."

**Ever thought about leaving?** "Sure, I would love to have maybe another store in New York or L.A. or Tokyo. That's my dream. But ... my home base will always be here."

**How Tampa Bay can become a fashion mecca:** With the help of the press.

**Advice for designers:** "Stay with your passion. It took me so long. If I can do it, you can do it. I came here not even being able to speak English."

**On the Web:** ivankaska.com, myspace.com/ivankas

### Essence Flowers, 30, St. Petersburg

The Polk County native runs Remarkable Designs By Essence, sewing swim suits, wedding dresses, evening gowns and other women's wear.

#### Fashion education:

Flowers, whose grandmother taught her to sew, graduated from Tampa's International Academy of Design and Technology and has interned at Fashion Weeks in New York and Miami.

**Biggest challenge of working here:** "People in this area — and I'm generalizing — they think that mall shopping is the way to go."

**Ever thought about leaving?** "Last week I participated in New York Fashion Week. I actually showed my collection. I loved it, don't get me wrong, but I don't want to move. ... My inspirations come better here than in New York. I'm trying to break that whole 'Let's shop out of town' (mentality)."

**How Tampa Bay can become a fashion mecca:** Hold more fashion shows.

**Advice for designers:** "Do not give up, because there have been so many obstacles I've been faced with. Being homeless is one of them. I live with (friends) right now. But I choose this lifestyle because this is ... my God-given talent."

**On the Web:** rdedesigns.com, myspace.com/dezine1

### Bebe Ziegler, 40, Brandon

Ziegler's Ice It By Bebe Z has licensing agreements with the National Hockey League and Discovery Communications, creating fitted T-shirts for hockey lovers and fans of TLC's *Miami Ink* and *LA Ink*. Ziegler uses three production facilities in Los Angeles.

**Fashion education:** Ziegler studied fashion merchandising at Seffner's Armwood High School.

**Biggest challenge of working here:** "Not having the celebrity contacts."

**Ever thought about leaving?** "Family's so important to me. My son is 7 I'm on a plane every month because of it, but I always have to come back home to Brandon."

**How Tampa Bay can become a fashion mecca:** Partner with designers in Orlando to bring in more celebs.

**Advice for designers:** Stay focused on your target buyers; don't take on too much at once.

**On the Web:** iceitbybebez.com