

QUINTESSENTIAL STYLE

SUMMER ISSUE
2007 > \$5.00

Q

SUMMER
CLASSICS

JULIE CHRISTIE, 1970



qmagazine-digital.com

This page, top to bottom: The airy Tibi boutique in New York's Soho; A striped voile blouse and high-waisted chambray shorts from the current collection.

➤ Opposite: Tibi creator Amy Smilovic.



The Making Of An Icon

BY CAROLINE CALLAHAN

Fashion critic Cathy Horyn recently took pause in one of her *New York Times* columns to pose a question we've all been asking ourselves these days: "When did designer clothes get so far beyond ordinary reach that it became necessary to give them an air of sanctity and suffering, as though we were pilgrims not for Mecca but for Prada?"

There is no simple answer to the inquiry—no single date where a gaggle of top designers convened together at a *Project Runway*-like judging ceremony to say: "Let's make handbag prices closer to \$2,000 than \$1,000!" Or, "Tunics really should ring in at around \$2,600."

But thankfully for our wallets and closets alike, one particular label—a Hong Kong-born, New York-bred outfit called Tibi—is creating iconic pieces that prove that yes(!) fashion continues to thrive at a more accessible level—without even the slightest sacrifice of personality, style, or well-fitting wit. The secret to what makes Tibi tick lies in the relaxed-but-devoted demeanor

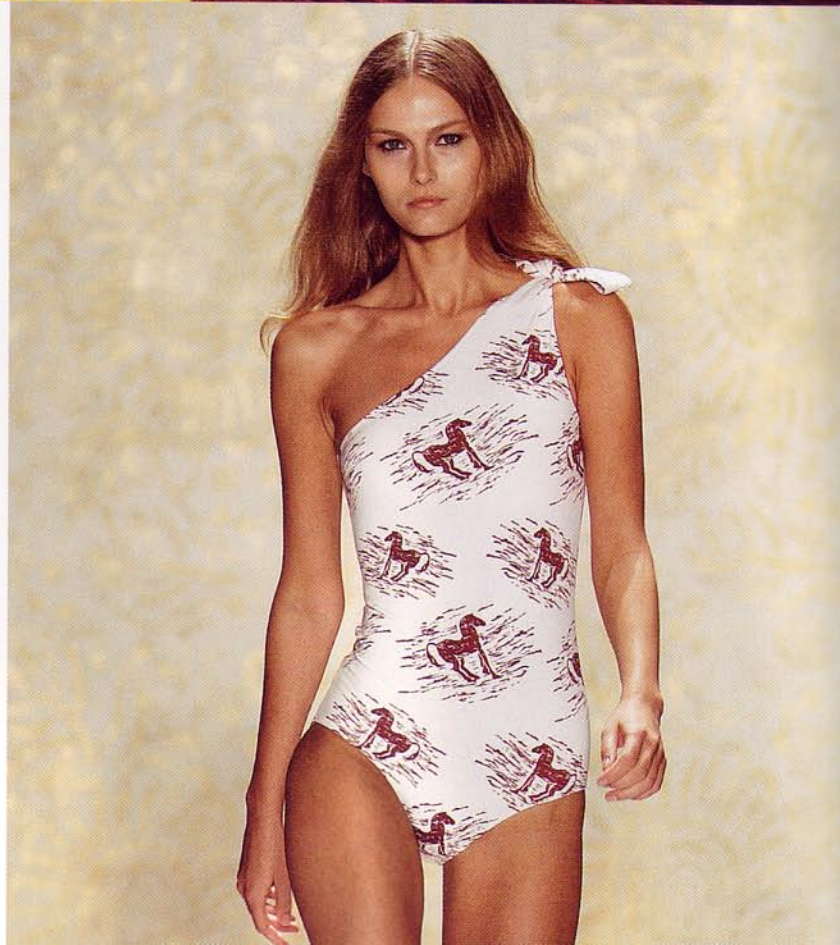


and just about anywhere else where casual and chic intertwine. Smilovic and her husband have taken on the full responsibilities of the company; she and her original partner parted amicably.

Apart from achieving a more grown-up aesthetic, this past year Tibi made significant strides: The brand opened its first New York store around the corner from its Soho Offices—a boutique with a clean-well-lighted-place kind of feel that's punctuated by the feminine skirts, tops, dresses, pants, and even a yellow-and-white patterned rug that Smilovic designed herself.

Tibi also enticed Liz Walker, formerly of Emilia Fanjul Communications, to join the 30-plus person team as Director of PR. "Now I'm within talking distance of Amy and sales and production, so I'm able to keep up with the new collections, retail accounts, and ideas," says Walker, a Palm Beach native who relishes the opportunity to focus on the brand.

Stretching outside of New York, Tibi's major project has been its affiliation with famed The Clois-





Tibi Icon / This page, left to right: The loft-like Soho boutique perfectly complements the feminine tops, dresses, and coats of Smilovic's collection; Chessy Wilson and Byrdie Bell wearing Tibi. ▶ Opposite, left to right: The window-pane belted trench coat from the current collection; The Thebes chiffon dress in one of the colorful prints the brand is known for.

ter Hotel on Sea Island, Georgia. (Smilovic grew up nearby on St. Simon's Island, where her own company is still headquartered.) The Cloister endeavor has been a comprehensive undertaking, beginning first with uniforms that Smilovic designed for the hotel staff and aim to capture the local vibe. (Think toile, azaleas, and cotton flowers.)

Perhaps more telling about the scope of Smilovic's talents—and what we might expect from future Tibi collections—is the luxury suite at the hotel that Amy designed, managing to mix



contemporary and traditional aesthetics. "The challenge with this was that I didn't have the points of reference that I am used to with designing a dress collection," says Smilovic, who accordingly enlisted the collaborative help of Los Angeles-based furniture designer Byron Stipling to create a mirrored coffee table, an old-world feeling tufted bed, and a glass table with elk antlers that serve as the base of the table. Smilovic's own father—a painter whose canvases encircled his two daughters during their younger years—painted the Chinoiserie screens that punctuate the entryway, again replacing such Eastern themes with local birds, trees, and flowers.

What can we expect from future Tibi? A first line of shoes, for starters, slated for shipment in November of this year, and handbags likely to be seen on shelves in 2008. A second retail store might also appear in New York—probably, according to Amy, on the Upper East Side, since so much of the clientele is based there.

As for home wares like those found down south in Sea Island, "We might venture into things like stencils for walls, pillows, and accessories," hints Smilovic, who is in the process of redoing her own house in Greenwich. (She adds: "I just want to recreate my Sea Island suite for my own home!")

And in the meantime, the clothes—as yet chosen by celebrities like Scarlett Johansson, Drew Barrymore, and Cameron Diaz, to name a few—continue to make their mark on the fashion world today and to remind us, as Cathy Horyn did in her aforementioned column, that good fashion hasn't always been exorbitantly priced. In Horyn's words: "The clothes, like the best of clothes, belonged to the times." ♦