

Ultra Lounge

BY SHELLEY MOENCH-KELLY

Erin Braxton trades a desk job for a design studio.

What started off as a simple shopping spree turned into a whole new career for designer Erin Braxton.

Her sleek, simple loungewear creations maximize the beauty and comfort of luxurious fabrics and bridge an age-old gap between delicate lingerie and the oh-so-comfortable "boyfriend" T-shirt.

One look at the stylish, contemporary loungewear offerings on ErinBraxton.com, and you'd assume the designer had been in the business forever. Braxton was, however, an advertising and marketing professional for 10 years and fell into the world of design via a two-day shopping excursion with a friend. "We spent an entire weekend buying tons of clothes and shoes and returned home exhausted," she recalls. "After emptying all our shopping bags and contemplating our purchases, we ended up returning almost everything except the loungewear."

Braxton developed an appreciation for comfortable, sexy loungewear that fit well

and made her feel good. These qualities were what fueled her search for more loungewear, an endeavor that led to a sand-swept desert of outdated designs. "I found lots of camisoles, tank tops, and flannel pajamas, many of which were cute, but not always right for a variety of occasions, like opening the door for FedEx, or being sexy enough for my man to appreciate. I decided to design a line of loungewear that I loved and hopefully my customers would love, too."

In spite of the fact that Braxton had no prior fashion design experience, she researched the market, developed a business plan, and networked to establish and grow the business. "I went to every trade show you could imagine," she explains. "Buyers want to know you're going to be around, that you're not just a fly-by-night player. If the industry sees you repeatedly at shows, they'll eventually come around." Fred Segal Fun is one of those industry leaders that took notice. The upscale Santa Monica, Calif. boutique-to-the-stars just inked a deal for Braxton's designs, and Trousseau of Chicago has also signed on. Some other well-known boutiques that carry the line are Top Drawer in Houston and Tropical Affair in Santa Barbara, Calif.

How does Braxton attract all of these boutiques? With designs that range from a classic cami-and-short set to a chemise with an unexpected T-back design. Boy shorts, slipdresses, and lounge sets round out the collection (many of which can also double as ready-to-wear items—easily paired with jeans or dressed up for the evening). The garments are created from a variety of natural fabrics, including Modal and 100 percent cotton, cotton jersey, and cotton pique. "I've learned that the way the fabric feels is many times more important to my customers than the style of the garment," notes Braxton. "I don't use polyester or other synthetic fibers because I want to keep everything super soft and totally natural. I want the styles to be hip, sexy, fun, and current."

Braxton just launched the Basics collection, which includes tees, tanks, pants, and hoodies that will be available year-round. Other items in the collection are only available until they're out of stock. "I change my color palette with the season ... and for Fall 2007, I see color trends as very earthy. I'll still offer pastels in the future, but I'll be adding richer colors to the line, like camel and eggplant, and for the first time, black."

With the success of her new company, Erin remains grounded. Part of the business growth plan is the recent relocation of company headquarters from Dallas to Los Angeles, which will provide easier global access to suppliers, buyers, and other professionals who help the business expand. Part of that growth involves the karmic practice of "paying it forward." Braxton muses humbly but confidently, "As my company grows, I want to give back to the community—not just those that helped me build the business." Instead, Braxton wants to donate to charities that she's passionate about. "It has to mean something to me personally," she says.

Braxton has great hopes for the future of her business. "Ultimately, when people ask their friends, 'where can I find great loungewear?,' I want the answer to be Erin Braxton." ■

Erin Braxton

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