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Tip Top

Alison Blumenfeld is working in a fresh fashion niche—simple, luxurious tops.

Portrait by ERIC RAY DAVIDSON

What are you supposed to wear with a Chanel or Balenciaga jacket?" Fledgling Los Angeles designer Alison Blumenfeld has set out to address that fashion dilemma. "Don't get me wrong," she says, "I love American Apparel, but that's not what I want to wear with, say, a gold Helmut Lang pencil skirt." Her solution: Blumenfeld, a line centered on tops made from supple silk jersey, the shapes casual and classic but considerably more refined than standard-issue cotton T's. She launched it last spring and quickly attracted retailers such as Wilkes Bashford, Stanley Korshak, Hirshleifer's and Barneys New York.

"She nailed it," says Sarah Easley, an owner of Kirna Zabête in New York, who also bought the collection. "As a retailer, it's hard to find things to mix up with Balmain, Lanvin and Nina Ricci. This line can wear different hats. It can hang next to Jean Paul Gaultier and Chloé and Peter Som."

Blumenfeld features 15 styles in seven colors. "I don't want to overstate what I do, because it's so simple, yet it was missing in the market," says Blumenfeld, a



From top: Designer Alison Blumenfeld in her Hancock Park apartment; two of her silk jersey tops for fall.

former designer and art director at Esprit who also works in interior design. She attributes the relatively high prices—from \$300 for a basic tank top to \$1,250 for a halter dress—to her use of high-grade Italian fabric and manufacturing.

Though the pieces have attracted a range of customers, from aspiring starlets to Hollywood wives and social doyennes, after two seasons Blumenfeld still works out of a coat closet-turned-office in her one-bedroom Hancock Park apartment. Not surprisingly, she wants to diversify the business and is starting with the addition of tops in metallic linens for spring 2008. She would also like to lower her entry-level prices to attract more women like herself, a goal she finds challenging. "I'm not my ideal customer," she says. "I want to make something more people can afford, but there's no need to do another cotton T-shirt." Ditto for men's wear. "I tried a cashmere knit," she says, "but it was pushing \$700, and even I couldn't do that."

Yet Blumenfeld scoffs at the notion of licensing her name or opening a store. "I think that's where companies start to lose it," she says. "It's easier when you don't try to take on the entire world in one bite. For me it's about doing one thing and doing it well."

—MARCY MEDINA

"There's no need to do another cotton T-shirt."

