

A MODERN TAKE ON FASHION APPEALING CLOTHING

Sylvia Rubin, Fashion Writer, San Francisco Chronicle

Most successful fashion boutiques make sure to stock the latest trends and have a knowledgeable sales staff to help customers style a look. What most boutiques don't have is the perpetually enthusiastic, fashion-obsessed brother-and-sister team of Ben and Chris Ospital of Modern Appealing Clothing (MAC) 387 Grove Street, San Francisco). They've been running their unique boutique since, (gasp), 1980.

Currently located at 387 Grove Street in the trendy Hayes Valley (one of San Francisco's most eclectic shopping streets, full of small indie stores with hard-to-find merchandise), they are a destination point for fashion editors from out of town. Kim Hastreiter, the editor of the avant-garde fashion magazine, Paper, always makes it her business to pay the Ospitals a visit. Anne Christensen, fashion director of the New York Times' "T" magazine, is a fan.

Some shoppers will balk at the prices. But the merchandise at MAC is of the highest quality, it's mostly European, it's hard to find and it's hand-selected by the owners with a San Francisco sensibility in mind (think sweaters, layering pieces, and leather jackets). They carry men's and women's wear, including selections by many of the world's more innovative designers, like Dries van Noten, Tsumori Chisato, Jil Sander, and Martin Margiela.

But what really sets them apart is their love of up-and-coming San Francisco talent. Many Bay Area designers got their big break at MAC, before they moved onto bigger venues. Currently, they carry the vintage-inspired lines by Lemon Twist (www.lemontwist.net), digitally printed silk dresses by Serial Cultura Cultura (www.serialcultura.com), and cool urban wear by Turk & Taylor (www.turkandtaylor.com), ,all small-production lines of clothing.

The MAC business model goes something like this: This is a family-run business, started by their mom, Jeri. Ben and Chris are always in the store to answer questions about the new fabrics, the season's new shapes and help you pronounce some of those hard-to-pronounce Belgian names. You get one-on-one personal attention for as long as it takes. Ben is a wealth of fashion know-how and knowledge; he regularly travels to Europe to attend runway shows and meet designers in their showrooms. The boutique is a combination art gallery (with flea market found flower paintings all over the place), it has an indoor garden, changing art installations, two friendly house dogs and a well-edited selection of artful outfits.

But there's something else going on at MAC as well. The Ospitals are very involved in the community; they often host fashion book signings, and put on elegant dinner parties for their clients, just because. As for new lines he's carrying, Ben says he's very excited about Turk & Taylor right now.

"I love their Harris tweed wool riding jacket, their cotton hemp pleated skirt and glazed organic cotton dresses for evening," he says. "They produce the line in Oakland at a new factory that provides a great health care package for its workers; we love that too," he adds. "They are a small company that thinks small, they don't do a big collection."

Up-and-coming designer Jen Jennings of Serial Cultura is another MAC find. A graphic artist turned fashion designer, Jennings makes easy-fit silk dresses and tops with cutouts in the back, in bold , graphic digital prints. "I love the mystical, psychedelic, kaleidoscope quality; the cool, cosmic vibe of her prints," Ben said. "She's really designing for the Holly-Go-Lightlys of the new millennium."

As a gift with purchase, the Osptials are currently giving out made-in-SF canvas totes, bags, each designed by an up and coming S.F. artist. They are also in the process of building a new website, at www.modernappealingclothing.com. It's not completed yet, but will be in a few weeks, Ben said.

"Nowhere in San Francisco can you find such a cool mix of cerebral, local and international design stars in such a relaxed, snob-free environment," wrote Christensen on the *New York Times* fashion blog, *The Moment*, in April of this year.