



Zaza Couture

# DESIGNER CHAT: USHERING IN SPRING '10

A behind-the-scenes glimpse of the spring collections and insight from the designers who brought them to life. By Caletta Crawford

## Tereze Gruntmane, designer Zaza Couture

**Lasting impressions:** I grew up in the former Soviet Union, where everything—including clothes—was dull gray in color. I was 18 when Latvia became independent and I had my first opportunity to see other countries. We were amazed at how colorful the world was outside the Iron Curtain. The need for color has always followed me, which is why Zaza is so colorful, bright and happy.

**Branching out:** Every season we give our groups names. We have had countries, states, cities, favorite girls' names, fruits,

opera names; this season we have tree names. The Tamarix group has a marine theme—our first in seven years. The black-and-white color combination in the Empress group is also new for us.

**Standing firm:** We have not changed anything in our approach due to the economy. We have even added much more elaborate applications to our collections. I buy the same high-quality fabrics for the same high price, but we have kept our wholesale prices at the same level for the past three years.

**Reinventing favorites:** Our bestseller every season is our famous Cinderella

dress, a layered flare dress in which we use up to seven different fabrics. When a girl puts it on, the first thing she does in front of the mirror is turn around and around. There is something magical in the girl and a twirl.

**Loving the work:** I love satisfied customers, and we do our best to be their friends. We still personally answer our phone, and we know many of our store owners from day one. There is a beauty in being a small business owner—you learn to be flexible. Every evening I can't wait for the morning to come. I am so lucky to be able to do what I love!

## Rolando Landeros, designer Rabbit Moon

**Design philosophy:** I can never look at a garment with no details. I like to do different treatments like pleats and ruching, not just ruffles. I love intricate things that are wearable. You can't compromise that with babies or they won't be comfortable.

**Seasonal inspiration:** The blues and greens for this collection are based on the breezy, spring-y things I love so much. I used to visit my grandmother in the spring, and she had a collection of buttons in a jar. The colors are a reflection of that.

**Unexpected twists:** I've been playing with dots for the last two seasons. This season, I designed a print for boys in which different colored dots look like a line from a distance. The summery citrus colors form stripes, which are typical for boys' clothes.

**On trends:** I have a degree in industrial engineering, so when I see things—including trends—I tend to change them. I always think of the other side of the spectrum, looking for a better way to do something.

**Nod to the economy:** I've been careful with the construction of the garments. Construction makes a big difference in price point. We still have lots of details, but we were careful not to go over the top. People are careful about what they buy now. They don't want to feel like they're paying too much.

**Celebrity muse:** Gwen Stefani's son Kingston looks like a little man. That would have been me as a kid, because she dresses him like a big boy.

**Childhood wish realized:** I love clothes. As a child, I never had a chance to really dress up. Now I dress up every chance I get—even for the simplest occasion.



## Wendy Yang, merchandiser, and Ingrid Kaczender, designer, Rebelette

**The next chapter:** We're known for our activewear and tees. For spring, we're evolving into more of a collection so we'll be more important to our retailers. We've added dresses, skirts, shorts, jackets and tanks for a one-stop shop. We're filling that mid-range, under \$50 void.

**Design niche:** Girls in the 7 to 16 sizes have a lot to choose from in kids' clothes as well as adults', so we're trying to find the happy medium between Gap preppy and really fast track.

**Back to the future:** Ingrid: The '80s was the height of my schooling, and I would buy oversized men's suit jackets and wear them with leggings to make it hip. [That look] is back but better now—no big shoulder pads!

**Unconventional ideas:** We've lined our white denim twill motorcycle jacket with a Liberty print. Using it this way makes the print edgier. Plus, we have dip-dyed eyelet Easter pieces.

**Yin and yang groupings:** Acid-wash denim, neon colors and silver liquid leggings offer an '80s rocker vibe while mixed Liberty prints, washed-out surf looks and Saint-Tropez nauticals provide an easy summer feel.

**Tween idols:** Kendall and Kylie Jenner from "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" have good style and they mix it up, which fits with us because we're not one-dimensional. Madonna's daughter Lourdes has a sassy style, and we kind of have the rocker thing going on.



**Danielle Nestor, kids' division director  
Alpha Industries**

**Adapting history:** Alpha is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year and until 2001, the company supplied flight jackets to the military, so a lot of our influence comes from there. I like details and hidden secrets, so we do twofer tops and interior pockets and items like our girls' jacket that transforms into a vest. It all fits in well with the military look, which I did a lot of research on.

**Design direction:** Spring '09 was our first season offering sportswear; until then it was only outerwear. We've seen our boys' business take off, so we're focusing on boys for sportswear. Cargo pants and shorts were our No. 1 sellers. We're bringing in some clear, bright colors for tops and neutral bottoms. Menswear styling is more streamlined, so we're going cleaner.

**Happy accidents:** I worked with the graphic designer to come up with a dip-dye motif, which turned out more like a paint splash. If a kid spills, it will just add to it.

**Leading the charge:** Maddox Jolie-Pitt wears a lot of military coats, and Kingston Rossdale has that rock 'n' roll yet conservative, preppy look. It's clean when it needs to be, just like our style.

**Calculating value:** I'm one of seven kids, so my mom always looked at how many times something could be worn. Her idea was that each wear was worth a dollar. I still think that way, especially in this economy. I've read a lot about what people want now and that's multifunctional items, like our girls' raincoat that has a button-out lining that carries it into fall.

**Wish list:** When I was a kid, I always wanted a fur muff, but I lived in California, so it wasn't practical.



**Sydney Platkin, co-designer  
Zoe LTD**

**Ahead of the curve:** We've always targeted dressy dresses and suiting, but three or four years ago we added our Go-To dresses—easy, better-priced dresses you can get a lot of use out of.



**Dream deferred:** I was very much an individual and my mother encouraged that. In addition to wearing the trends, I added crazy jewelry and wore bandanas—but she drew the line at suede ankle boots with fringe. She said they were big-girl boots. With fringe in now, I was able to get them.

**The unexpected:** We're reinterpreting motorcycle chic, a look that we introduced last season as an exclusive with Neiman Marcus. We're putting a biker twist on piqué, which is ironic because it's a very light, almost preppy thing.

**Color therapy:** We're doing a lot of color-blocking with a mod inspiration in knits for comfort and washability. We're also introducing paisley, which we thought was too old for this girl, but we think she'll have fun with it. I think they sense the doom and gloom their parents are feeling, so it will be good for them to block it out with color and patterns.

**Celebrity spokesmodel:** At one point Miley Cyrus was our fashion icon, but she's too old now. Recently Sasha Obama wore one of our suits. That's reaching a great target audience because girls can look up to her.

**Adding value:** It's about offering really wearable things that she can wear to events and then work into her wardrobe. Longevity is key.

**Leonora Niewenhuizen,  
designer, Mim-Pi**

**Flower power:** The Summer '10 theme is The Secret Garden because I used to play a lot in my granny's garden. You will find birds and flowers in old-fashioned cross-stitch embroidery. We have added a special, retro element with screenprints of old dolls.

**Standout design:** Our sari skirt is made of five different Indian saris, which we mix so no two skirts are the same—but they all feature candy colors.

**Judicious takedowns:** While we adapt some styles from contemporary collections, not all are appropriate for children. For spring, we have three jumpsuits in the line. You see them in ladies' fashion and we've translated them for kids. I don't think miniskirts are nice for young girls, though.

**Target audience:** Brad and Angelina's kids are Mim-Pi kids. They're so hip and international. Suri Cruise is too stiff, the poor kid. I'd like to color her up!

**Economic reaction:** We've made our



clothes even brighter and happier. We've even added embroidered text, like "smile and the world smiles with you."

**Full circle:** When I was a child I wanted a jean jacket, so I made one with embroidered flowers for this collection. ▶63