

First Ladies

FEATURES

3 LEADING LADIES OF STREETWEAR + 1 POPULAR BLOGGER + LTD
= NO HOLDS BARRED, FREE FLOWING DISCUSSION ON
THE STRUGGLES, JOYS, MISCONCEPTIONS
AND UNITY THAT COME WITH
THE TERRITORY.

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IMAGES . JESSE WINTER

1.15.08 SIXTH WARD LES, NYC

STARRING:

LANIE ALBANZA-BARCENA: HELLZ BELLZ

CLAUDIA: CLAW MONEY

VASHTIE KOLA: VIOLETTE

WENDY LAM: NITROLICIOUS

STREETWEAR. DO YOU LIKE THE TERM?

CLAW MONEY: IT'S VERY PIGEONHOLING. I'M FROM THE STREETS SO IT'S AN APPROPRIATE TERM BUT IT CAN BE MORE THAN THAT.

LANIE ALBANZA-BARCENA: I'M OVER THE TERM STREETWEAR. I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S BECAUSE I'M GETTING OLDER BUT WHEN I HEAR IT NOW I THINK ABOUT THE YOUNGER GENERATION.

DID IT MEAN SOMETHING AT SOME POINT?

C: IT WAS A CATEGORY, LIKE SWEATPANTS, ZIP-UP TRACKSUITS. IT WAS ALSO THE FIRST WAVE OF URBAN LIKE PNB, ECKO, AND THAT CHANGED TO SOMETHING ELSE NOW. A LOT OF THE BIGGER URBAN BRANDS ARE INVESTING AND SOMETIMES BUYING THE SMALLER STREETWEAR BRANDS.

WHAT ARE SOME MISCONCEPTIONS OF BEING A FEMALE DESIGNER?

L: THE MISCONCEPTION I HAD IN THE VERY BEGINNING WAS THAT I WASN'T DOING MY OWN WORK. PEOPLE WOULDN'T SAY IT TO ME BUT THEY WOULD ASK BAM LIKE ARE YOU REALLY DOING THE GRAPHICS FOR LANIE? I HATED IT.

C: AS A GRAFFITI ARTIST I HAD TO DEAL WITH GUYS THAT THOUGHT I DIDN'T PAINT. I WAS THE FIRST BRAND THAT WAS OUT THERE FOR GIRLS. THERE WAS NOTHING BACK IN 2002. I THINK IT'S SPECIAL AND AN HONOR TO BE IN THIS INDUSTRY BECAUSE IT'S HARD TO BE A WOMAN IN BUSINESS. YOU HAVE TO BE A MOTHERFUCKING BITCH. YOU DO.





FEATURES



"IT'S SPECIAL AND AN HONOR TO BE IN THIS INDUSTRY BECAUSE IT'S HARD TO BE A WOMAN IN BUSINESS. YOU HAVE TO BE A BITCH. YOU DO."

— CLAW



"IT WAS REALLY JUST A CREATIVE OUTLET FOR ME. I DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD BE A BUSINESS."

— LANIE



— WENDY



"I WAITED TOO LONG. I DO THIS WITH EVERYTHING. IT GOT TO A POINT WHERE I DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE. I SAW SO MANY OTHER PEOPLE DOING GREAT THINGS ON THEIR OWN."

— VASHTIE

YOU ALL STARTED AT DIFFERENT POINTS. CLAW YOU WERE A GRAF ARTIST. VASHTIE YOU DIRECTED VIDEOS AND PROMOTED PARTIES. LANIE YOU WORKED AT AN ADVERTISING AGENCY. THAT MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO PEOPLE QUESTIONING...

VASHTIE: ME COMING UP WITH A CLOTHING LINE REALLY STARTED IN 1999 WHEN I WAS WORKING IN RETAIL. IT'S FUNNY BECAUSE AT THE TIME I WAS LITERALLY TAKING MY STÜSSY AND SUPREME T-SHIRTS AND CUTTING THEM SO THEY WOULD FIT ME TAILORED.

L: I LOVED STÜSSY MEN'S BUT I NEVER WORE THEIR WOMEN'S CLOTHES BECAUSE IT WAS TOO CUTE.

C: THE GIRL'S LINE ALWAYS BLOWED BECAUSE THEY DUMB DOWN THE MEN'S LINE AND FEMINIZED IT FROM A POINT OF VIEW THAT IS NOT THEIR CUSTOMERS.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS IMPORTANT?

C: MY WHOLE THING IN MY LIFE, STARTING WITH GRAFFITI HAS BEEN TO INSPIRE OTHER GIRLS. IF I CAN DO IT, YOU CAN DO IT TOO. IT'S NOT FAIR OUT THERE AND IF CAN INSPIRE ANOTHER GIRL TO DO HER THING AND TAKE ME OUT, SO BE IT.

WHEN YOU STARTED OUT DID YOU THINK IT WOULD BE A SERIOUS BUSINESS?

L: IT WAS REALLY JUST A CREATIVE OUTLET FOR ME. I DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD BE A BUSINESS. WHEN I WAS AT ROCAWEAR, ALL THEY WANTED ME TO DO WAS COPY BABY PHAT BECAUSE THEY WERE NUMBER ONE IN SALES. I THOUGHT, AS THE ART DIRECTOR I COULD DO WHAT I THOUGHT WAS COOL. I'D DO THE GRAPHICS, HAND IT IN AND THEY WOULD SAY, IT'S TOO OUT OF THE BOX, NO ONE IS GOING TO GET IT, IT'S NOT GOING TO SELL. IT ALL ACCUMULATED AND I QUICKLY MADE A LINE SHEET AND SENT IT TO MY FRIENDS WHO HAD STORES AND THEY WERE LIKE, WHY DON'T YOU ACTUALLY MAKE THESE?

V: ONE OF THE REASONS WHY I AM SO DEDICATED TO THIS IS THAT IN THE BEGINNING I DIDN'T WANT ANY INVESTMENTS. I REALLY WANTED TO LEARN THIS ALL ON MY OWN.

C: I'M STILL BAD AT THE BUSINESS. WE'VE HAD HORROR STORIES WHERE I HAD TO CALL MY BIG SCARY HOMEBOYS TO GO TO STORES TO COLLECT.

WOULD YOU GUYS SELL IF SOMEONE CAME ALONG AND OFFERED TO BUY YOU OUT?

C: I CAN'T JUST GIVE IT TO YOU. IT'S MY ENTIRE IDENTITY. IT'S REALLY HARD WHEN YOU PUT ALL YOUR HEART INTO SOMETHING TO GIVE IT TO SOMEONE ELSE TO MANIPULATE.

L: I'VE INVESTED SO MUCH IN IT. I WOULDN'T JUST LET IT GO. I'LL DO IT AS LONG AS I CAN.

WENDY: DO YOU THINK BLOGS HELP YOUR BRANDS AND DO YOU READ THE COMMENTS?

C: I NEVER READ THE COMMENTS, FUCKING HATERS.

L: I WANT TO HEAR WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY. THERE WAS THAT ONE TIME WHEN YOU BLOGGED THE SHIRT THAT CASSIE WAS WEARING. IT SOLD OUT AFTER THAT.

DOES THE PHOTO OF A CELEBRITY WEARING ONE OF YOUR PIECES DIRECTLY BOOST SALES?

C: IT'S WEIRD, I HAVE ALL THE INDIE GIRLS LIKE MIA AND SANTO GOLD, SOME OF THEM I HAVE NO IDEA HOW THEY GOT MY STUFF LIKE AMY WINEHOUSE. THAT DIDN'T HAVE THE EFFECT THAT CAMERON DIAZ DID. EVERYONE WAS LIKE WHERE CAN I GET THAT SWEATSHIRT AND THAT THING WAS FROM FOUR YEARS AGO. SHE MUST HAVE HAD IT IN THE BOTTOM OF THE CLOSET.

L: BÉYONCE WORE MY TEE AND IT WENT NUTS. CASSIE...

C: WHO IS CASSIE? I SEE HER IN MAGAZINES, SHE'S VERY PRETTY BUT WHO IS SHE?

IS IT A COINCIDENCE THAT WE'RE IN NEW YORK RIGHT NOW?

L: IF I WOULD HAVE STAYED IN SAN DIEGO OR LA, I DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE A LINE. NEW YORK BROUGHT IT OUT IN ME...THE PEOPLE, THE HUSTLE, THE ENERGY.

C: I THINK NEW YORK HAS THAT MYSTIQUE THAT PEOPLE WANT TO BUY INTO. THE FACT THAT IT'S A COMPLETE MELTING POT GIVES IT A LOT OF FLAVOR.

WHAT WAS THE MAIN FACTOR FOR LAUNCHING YOUR LINE WHEN YOU DID?

V: I WAITED TOO LONG IN MY OPINION. I DO THIS WITH EVERYTHING. I'M ALWAYS LIKE I'LL WAIT ON THAT. I REMEMBER READING A QUOTE SOMEWHERE LIKE GREAT IDEAS THAT ARE NEVER EXECUTED ARE A WASTE OF SPACE. IN '99 I WAS LIKE I WANT TO START A LINE, I NEED THE PERFECT NAME AND THEN IT'S OH I'M BUSY WITH SCHOOL. IT GOT TO A POINT WHERE I DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE ANYMORE. I SAW SO MANY OTHER PEOPLE DOING GREAT THINGS ON THEIR OWN.

C: I DON'T THINK ANY OF US THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE A REAL BUSINESS. I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE STILL WANT TO BUY MY STUFF. HALF THE BATTLE IS JUST ACTUALLY DOING IT. IT'S ALL ABOUT PAYING FORWARD. THE MORE PEOPLE YOU HELP ALONG THE WAY, THE MORE HELP YOU WILL GET ALONG THE WAY. I BELIEVE THAT.