



A Collection for the Woman Going Places

By Leah Walker



Women's
clothing designer,
Jia Li, has taken
the utilitarian look
out of multifunctional
clothing and made it
ultra chic.





Swedish, The Basic



Jia Collection features an array of tops, dresses, jackets and coats, all of which can be worn at least two different ways.

Classic shapes combined with innovative design are trademarks of Jia Collection. I first discovered Jia last spring and have since worn her pieces from the beaches of Maui to the mountains of Switzerland. Amazed by the craftsmanship, design and versatility of Jia Collection, I sat down with the designer for a look inside of her line for the woman on the go.

You're living and designing in New York City. What was your path to get to the United States? How did you become involved in fashion?

Growing up in Yunnan, the most biologically, culturally and ethnically diverse province of China, I was influenced by the many minority groups dressed in laboriously crafted costumes. My foray into the fashion world started early when I became enamored with the clothing creations I discovered in the small selection of fashion magazines at my local bookstore. It was then that my passion for fashion design came to life.

In 2000, I obtained a master's degree in International Business from the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration. My master's thesis, "Value Creation for Fashion Marketing Firms," won top honors among the class.

In 2002, I came to New York to study at Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) and graduated summa cum laude in 2005. After graduation, I interned and worked at Anna Sui, Maggie Norris Couture, Macy's Merchandising Group and Perry Ellis International. After

working for other brands for a few years and seeing a lack of comfortable, chic and versatile designs, I decided to launch my own collection designed for modern women who need versatile fashion designs for work, travel and leisure.

What led you to start Jia Collection? Was it difficult to take the leap of starting your own line?

Besides trying to fill a market niche as mentioned previously, there are few other reasons. I really dislike that many fashion brands just copy each other. Many more innovative fashion products can be designed and made which provide greater value for a modern lifestyle. I think that women should have their own unique style rather than just following a trend. By giving women designs that are classic with an edge, they can easily have the looks they want.

With women living a more fast-paced lifestyle, they're attending more events, both socially and professionally. It can be challenging to dress stylishly, especially for women who don't want to repeat outfits. By offering women reversible and convertible designs, efficiency is much improved in women's daily dressing.



Hot Stome, Rock On



Describe the woman you are designing for. Jia Collection is for modern women on the go.

Because of the versatility of the designs, our customer is able to wear our line for a multitude of occasions—work, cocktail parties, charity events, gallery openings, girls’ night out, shopping and both business and leisure travel.

Each of your pieces can be worn at least two different ways. Please explain how you’re able to create stylish and functional clothes.

Traditionally, there is always an inside and outside of each clothing piece. By shifting the perspective a little, the inside can become outside and vice versa. This is particularly doable compared to many other products because clothing is made of fabric, which is

very pliable. Instead of designing only the outside, I design the inside of a clothing piece as well. By paying meticulous attention to details and construction, a clothing piece is utilized to its maximum potential—beautiful and perfectly constructed inside out. To be honest, it is really not as easy as it sounds. To have a design that is perfect both inside and out poses challenges not encountered on non-reversible pieces.

Many of your pieces are knit. Is this your preferred material, or do you find that it simply works best for your clients?

Knit, especially sweater knit, is my preferred material for several reasons. When designing knits, the fabric is also designed, since knits are made from one single yarn. The process of knitting is one of creating fabric, clothing

pieces and shape simultaneously.

When designing knits, I can make it in the exact color and pattern as I’d like, and with modern knitting technology, many interesting double-face fabrics can be created that look quite different. Various colors and patterns are achieved, which open up a whole world of design possibilities.

Given their stretch and breathability, knits are very comfortable. They’re also easy to take care of and don’t wrinkle, which is a huge time saver when traveling.

How do you keep things fresh season after season? Where do you find inspiration?

I have an open mind and draw inspiration from traveling, music, movies, art, food, etc. Everything can be an inspiration if you pay enough attention. My mind is like a big closet with many drawers in which I can take from based on what I need in that moment. I pay attention to the changing needs of my customers and draw from my inspiration drawers. Then I create designs catering to their immediate needs.

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Your pieces have made their way into InStyle, Lucky and O magazines. You’ve also had your clothes on a number of celebrities, including Kerry Washington, Maria Menounos and Julia Ormond. Who would you love to see wearing your designs?

I really admire Angelina Jolie. She is a woman on the go. She is brave, charitable, empathetic and compassionate. I see her as a great actress, mom, wife and ambassador. She is the epitome of multi-tasking, which is how I want my designs to be.

Where do you see Jia Collection in five years?

I would like to see Jia recognized by many more customers and become the #1 go to source for versatile fashion, with much larger national and international distribution.

For more of Jia Collection, including the ten benefits of wearing reversible clothing, visit jiacollection.com. Luxe Beat readers may use the code ‘TRAVEL’ to receive a 25% discount.

