

WORKING GIRLS - Article from Harrods Estates

Sara Berman is a witty, British, woman's fashion label, designed and run by two sisters, Sara and Aimee Berman. Sara caught up with Sara & Aimee Berman to get the low-down on a business that is all about keeping it in the family.

There are boxes spilling over with new season cashmere samples, which have just arrived following a stay in customs. A room in the back is rammed with rails of clothes, waiting to be shipped out to department stores and boutiques - so many in fact, you can't get up the stairs. Two of the cutest dogs I ever did see are chilling in the office. Welcome to the world of Sara Berman.

As a fashion capital, London is known as an incubator for new ideas, many of which never get much further than the drawing board. The Berman sisters however, have cleverly bucked this trend with their creative yet savvy approach to the business of fashion.

"It's important to have a knowledge about what is going on at every level of your business," says Sara, 28, who originally set up the label in 1999. "So many new designers just make something without thinking about the cost," pipes up Aimee, 24, who, for the past year has been formally working alongside her sister. "We know how much everything costs, right down to the lining," interjects Sara.

Down to earth, fond of completing each other's sentences and both sickeningly good looking, they both studied at Central St Martins before winding up working in the same company. "We always wanted to work together but Aimee felt she should do her own thing for a bit. Then I got pregnant," smiles Sara. "Obviously Sara wanted someone to grow the business who had a vested interest. So my independence was literally ruined in three months," banters Aimee.

With a successful mother - a fashion designer and businesswoman herself - as a constant source of inspiration, it is perhaps no surprise that both girls ended up working in fashion. Not that Helene Berman encouraged them. Neither was she initially impressed with their decision to follow her lead. "Mum wasn't happy about us working in fashion to start with. She knew it wasn't a glamorous business," says Aimee, "but when we did decide to go into the industry, she was really behind us."

Aside from learning many of the tricks of the trades from mum, Sara completed spells working for the likes of Jasper Conran, Armani and Maria Grachvogel whilst her graduate collection graced the windows of Fenwick on Bond Street. Meanwhile, Aimee, during her degree, set about customising t-shirts with handbag designing pal Amy Morris, and selling them to the likes of Paul & Joe.

Despite the now joint venture, the name of the label will not change. Something they both seem more than happy with. It simply wouldn't make commercial sense. Not now the company is so well known by international press and buyers. But for many families, the very idea of working so closely to a relative would find them running for the hills. Screaming. "If either of us wasn't happy with the working situation, we would obviously put our sisterly relationship first," says Sara. Or as Aimee puts it: "It's much easier as siblings to have a screaming match. It lasts all of three minutes." In any case,

disagreements are put to good use. If they do not both like a design, it doesn't make it to the final collection or they re-work it until they are both happy, ultimately making the final results stronger.

For this autumn, key pieces include a stunning Harris Tweed coat (“I am really excited about wearing that,” chimes Sara), a beautiful, chiffon, tiered frock in sunny yellow or rich green (“It's great for boobs,”) super cute tweed culottes or striped tops and skirts complete with their signature girly bows. Despite the growing success of the line, there are no immediate plans for a shop – “If the opportunity came up, then maybe.” Or a catwalk show – “It just doesn't really appeal.” Developing the label at a realistic and sensible pace seems far more important to both of them. “We just want to keep producing interesting and exciting collections – doing what we want,” says Sara. “Women come to us for something different – and that's what we want to keep trying to do.”

Refreshingly both are fans of their friend's style over that of celebrities and both admire women who can style things in an off-kilter kind of way. The latter perhaps perfectly summing up their quirky-come-wearable approach to design, which appeals to ladies who lunch or girls who just wanna have fun, in equal measure. Before I leave the studio, Sara is showing me a picture of her extremely cute baby daughter, Ella, who apparently already enjoys a spot of Fashion TV. Looks like the Berman fashion gene has no intention of skipping a generation just yet then.



