

Sister Bliss - Shoo Magazine - Winter 2004

Style runs in the Berman family. Sara and Amy's contemporary urban designs reflect an eclectic charm and sense of humour that has won them a Hollywood A-list fanbase. By Grace Saunders Photographed by Alistair Guy.

"We have the occasional obscene screaming match," confesses Amy Berman, one half of chic, super-kooky London design label, Sara Berman. "The rows blow over in seconds and we're back to gossiping about our latest shoe and bag purchases." "That's the beauty of being sisters," chimes in Sara, as the two go back to comparing their long, dangly Chanel earrings in front of the 1920s floor-length mirror.

It's the sisters' fiery temperaments and strong individuality that has helped the label go from strength to strength. Amy, 24, joined her sister Sara, 28, as equal partner on the label last year. So extensive has the demand been since then that they've even turned down some potential buyers. It doesn't take a fashion genius to see why. The label just oozes cool: you can't go anywhere hip in London these days without bumping into a fashionista sporting a Berman faux leopard-print coat, a striped furry pom-pom cardigan or an oversized knitted bow detail frock. Word has it that Gwyneth Paltrow; Kate Moss and Drew Barrymore have all picked up a Sara Berman number, and Cameron Diaz, Kate Hudson and Amy Winehouse are also customers.

On this crisp autumn morning, the girls are getting ready for a key meeting with American buyers. Hermes Kelly bags, Manolo Blahnik heels, Lulu Guinness pumps and vintage evening dresses are strewn around Sara's West London pad, and her seven-month-old daughter, Ella, coos in the background. This is Sara's base, but neither sister's wardrobe is out of bounds. "We share everything," confesses Amy. "It's like having a double wardrobe. Our tastes are so similar that we swap clothes and accessories all the time."

She slips into a chiffon print dress (from their autumn/winter 2003 collection), teamed with a pair of AG jeans, jewellery by Antonio Devette and some vintage black leather boots, and does a twirl for her sister. It is no surprise to those close to the girls that they have ended up as inseparable in business as they are in their home lives. "At the ages of six and ten, we used to go in the car to King Alfred's school in North London every morning [an institution that has started off many a rock star, fashion designer and media type]. We used to pass a house with a green slate roof, and promise ourselves that we would live there when we grew up," reminisces Sara as she ties the laces around her suede Zara boots. "It was always our dream to live together, work together, and even get married and have kids at the same time."

Sara founded the company in 1999, after graduating from Central Saint Martins, and it was only a matter of time before Amy joined the ranks, which she did when her sister became pregnant in the summer of 2003. Their mother, who also runs a variety of fashion and interior labels, has doubtless been a helpful influence in their early success. While Sara specialises in the knitwear and Amy in the commercial side of the label, the sisters share pretty much every element of the design process. So what is it that sets them apart from other British designers? "It's the sense of humour and childlike qualities in our designs," suggests Sara, who illustrates this perfectly by combining a knitted dress with a huge

yellow bow, with jeans and a pair of Celine leather biker boots. "I think it's also the fact that we're not driven by trends," adds Amy.

As well as their successes in Britain (they are stocked at Matches, Fenwick and Harrods), expansion has also taken them stateside, where they are among one of the fastest growing new labels there. They're currently found in Bergdorf Goodman and Henri Bendels in New York, with other stores set to follow. "We capture that Upper East-side rebel in New York girls," giggles Amy, appearing in a blue and chocolate lumberjack shirt and midnight twill trousers (both from their autumn/winter 2004 collection), teamed with a pair of Mootich round-toe stilettos. "I think girls love the English eccentric feel of our collection. It's like an urban Betsey Johnson," agrees Sara. You can see their point: Harris of Tweed culottes sit beside cashmere knits and pink princess coats, each with a huge signature bow or oversized button to give the garments a classic edge. Prices start at £100 for a plain twill skirt and go up to £370 for a winter coat.

You don't need to look far to see who these stylish sisters are designing for: girls just like themselves. The kind who aren't afraid to mix Manolos with Top Shop; vintage knits with the latest Marc Jacobs bag. The type of girls who take afternoon tea at Claridge's, spend summers in Ibiza and enjoy lazy afternoons walking their dogs (Millie and Roxy) on Primrose Hill. Not to mention the odd appearance in the pages of Vogue and Elie.

"I am a vintage queen," declares Sara as she sweeps down the marble staircase in a vintage red wool cardigan and her own-label green tweed pleated skirt. "Relik, Virginia Antiques and Top Shop Unique – I am a sucker for them all." Touch on the subject of accessories and the girls squeal with delight. "I love, love, love Mulberry bags," says Sara, as she rummages in her walk-in wardrobe to reveal an array of vintage Dior bags, the latest Marc Jacobs pumps, at least three pairs of Swarovski-crystal Gina sandals, Orca metallic bags, Chanel jewellery...

Amy's addiction is no better. "Jeans, jeans and more jeans," she squeals, holding up at least ten pairs of Earls, Sevens, French Connections and Levis. "My favourite shoes? Don't get me started – Dolce & Gabbana, R Soles cowboy boots – by the dozen – and, of course, my best friend, Olivia Morris. Her shoes are divine." To convince me, she slips into a pair of Morris's purple glitter kitten heels with a bow at the side. The future for these two young fashion fiends? A boutique, possibly in Marylebone High Street or Primrose Hill, suggests Amy. A collaboration with an accessories designer? Perhaps; either way they will achieve whatever goals they set their minds to.

In shimmers Sara wearing a candy layered chiffon dress with silver Olivia Morris boots, while her sister appears in an own-label, black Swiss-cotton shirt and wool pencil skirt, and a pair of vintage suede boots. Their appointment: The Wolseley for dinner. Anyone for champagne?

Right: Sara Berman wears candy layered chiffon dress, by Sara Berman (autumn/winter 2004 collection); boots, by Olivia Morris; sequin scarf, by Jigsaw; earrings, by Chanel. Amy Berman wears shirt and bow skirt, both by Sara Berman (A/W 04); vintage boots from Steinberg & Tolkein; earrings by Claire's Accessories

