

White-collar by day, black-turtleneck by night. A new breed of professionals gets its creative kicks by moonlighting in design

Design dabblers

BY SI SI PENALOZA

Corporate lawyer Shawn Hewson excuses himself from a meeting with two senior partners at his firm. He mumbles something about "having to be somewhere for a sec." Moments later, he rounds the corner of the photocopy room with a clear plastic bag full of baby blue seersucker slung over one shoulder à la Santa. As if on cue in a Busby Berkeley musical, he's face to face with the amused execs he's just fibbed to. Busted.

"Thought I'd sneak in a drop to our sample lady between deliberations," reminisces Hewson, one half of the budding Toronto label Bustle. This was just one example of high jinks resulting from putting out a clothing line on top of a full caseload.

"We're not exactly moonlighting," says design partner/girlfriend Ruth Promislow. "But we get a lot of puzzled looks from colleagues. This isn't your average lawyer downtime like golf or yacht clubbing."

Bay Street lawyers by day, this team takes multitasking to a new level. Promislow, a corporate litigator, often fields design-related calls from Hewson on her way to court.

Hewson and Promislow are a new breed of design dabblers, professionals who, unfulfilled by the challenges of their corporate day jobs, are trying their hands at more creative endeavours.

Is this a case of pebes taking their cues from celebs? After all, it seems one can't be a proper actor or pop star these days without issuing a line of something or other. There's Gwen Stefani's L.A.M.B. bags for Le Sportsac, Sofia Coppola's Milk Fed label and Sadie Frost's Frost/French lingerie, likewise a hit in London. Even Germanic überbabe Gisele Bündchen now "designs" for Birkenstock.

Using SuperMario primary colours, Hewson and Promislow's spring Bustle line reminisces on childhood matinée indulgences — imagine Mary Poppins and Willy Wonka on a lunch date at the Grand Prix. A recent collection featured croquette and lawn tennis-



JACQUES BOISSINOT/CANADIAN PRESS

inspired pieces in a palette plucked from an Edwardian picnic: tennis skirts in Grey Poupon mustard, and jerseys in cherry cordial pink. "Our shows are about the spectacle of bringing pop culture into everyday dressing," Promislow says.

For some dabblers, their moonlighting is a natural extension of their day job. For Zelda Israel-Schopp, teaching art to Grades 1 through 8 naturally evolved into a sideline jewellery business; her kaleidoscopic necklaces and bracelets are marketed under the name Peridot Designs. "After dealing with the kids all day, I come home and relax," Israel-Schopp says. "I work at my kitchen table — it's perfect. This stuff is so portable. I have

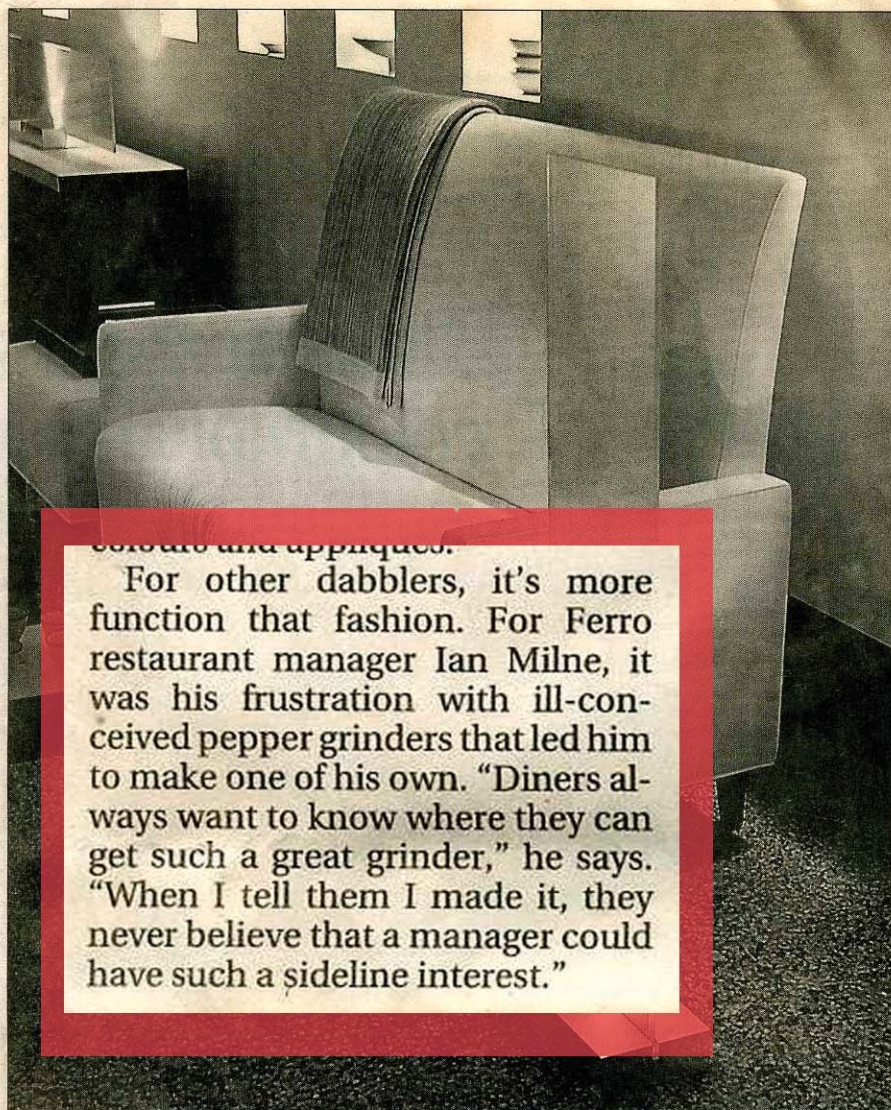
Clockwise from left: The Studioline floor lamp by Alex Ogus, about \$550, directs light upward instead of downward. In Toronto at OniOne, Fos Design, EuroLite, AGO, Palazzetti, Ma Zone and Royal Lighting. For art teacher Zelda Israel-Schopp, beaded jewellery is an outlet for creative energy (call 416-667-8770 or email zelda@peridotdesign.ca). Motorsport inspired fashion from lawyers-turned-fashion designers at Bustle (416-703-2745 or www.bustleclothing.com).

all my beads in different pots. I don't need a lot of space, just a table and good light."

Janet T. Planet, a mechanical engineer at Nestlé Co., works less clandestinely than the Bustle legal eagles or the moonlighting Schopp. In fact, her boss sponsors her Toronto Fashion Week runway events. (Mint, orange, dark and milk chocolate Aero bars were part of last season's press kit.)

But Planet's more of a techie than a sweet tooth; in discussing her line, she refers to experimental algebra and quantum physics — really. Such cerebral quirkiness has attracted fans like Bjork, and Hawksley Workman.

Marisa Menkes-Klass, the 23-



colours and appliques.

For other dabblers, it's more function that fashion. For Ferro restaurant manager Ian Milne, it was his frustration with ill-conceived pepper grinders that led him to make one of his own. "Diners always want to know where they can get such a great grinder," he says. "When I tell them I made it, they never believe that a manager could have such a sideline interest."

year-old daughter of condo mogul Murray Menkes, went from making gift baskets for the family firm to showing samples to Holt Renfrew's fashion director Barbara Atkin. Her line reworks the blue-collar men's undershirt à la Marc Jacobs, with irresistible hand-dyed patterns, colours and appliques.

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Necessity was also the mother of invention for Alex Ogus, a director of television commercials. He had moved into a loft and needed a floor lamp but was underwhelmed with the choices available. And anything that shared the aesthetic he was after was just too pricey. So he took matters into his own hands. "I knew absolutely nothing," he says, "so I started drawing pictures. There was a certain type I had in my head. I wanted a lamp that lit upwards instead of downwards. It was more dramatic."

It all came together very quickly: "From concept to stores was three months," says the entrepreneur, who has also just recently added coffee and dining-room table de-

signs to his repertoire.

This wasn't the first time Ogus sat down at the drafting table. Just out of school, he dreamed up a salad dressing line which, for almost a decade now, has been selling at Loblaw's and Dominion stores.

Like many dabblers, Ogus likes the variety. "A couple of hours of salad dressing, a couple of hours of lamps, a couple of hours directing," is how he describes his typical day. "It's funny how at the end of one day you've been in three worlds. But it's fun. It makes you laugh. You have a lot more responsibility, but you're too busy to think about it."

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With files from staff*