

neighborhood notes

create.
communicate.
connect.



Click on the compass above to explore the 95 neighborhoods and 2 business districts in Portland, Oregon.

search...

search here...

go

All Neighborhoods



 The Oregonian
News Network

June 13th, 2011



By Anna Reed



About Voting

Three Perspectives on the Current State of Local Clothing Production

The Challenges of Garment Production in Portland



Neighborhood Notes

It's difficult for indie designers to create their goods cost-effectively in Portland.

When it comes to purchasing goods, there is a hierarchy of consumerism that goes something like this: knowing a product was made in America, good; knowing a product was made in Oregon, better, knowing a product was made right here in Portland, super bananas awesome. This line of thinking drives us to support farmers' markets and mom-and-pop cafés over corporate giants and impersonal franchises. It's no different when it comes to clothing. Haven't we all, at one time or another, looked down at the label on our favorite sweater and thought "Made In... wait, where the heck is that country?" Ideally, we'd all sport duds made right here in Portland in hopes of supporting ethically-minded facilities (paging Kathie Lee Gifford) and boosting the local economy.

In reality, however, it can be extremely difficult for small, independent labels to create their own goods in a cost-effective (read: profitable) manner in Portland. Even if your latest to-die-for dress came from a locally owned boutique, chances are it was not manufactured in town. Portland is renowned for producing top-notch products in the form of beer, coffee, and cuisine. How far away are we from adding clothing to that list?

The answer has nothing to do with a lack of interest or effort on the part of local designers and everything to do with the simple economic model of supply and demand. Since there is such little demand for the equipment, materials, and labor involved in garment production, the prices of these essentials are extremely high and unrealistic for small boutique owners. On the contrary, in a city like Los Angeles, where there are multiple facilities producing fabric and sewing patterns, costs of materials and labor are much cheaper. Production companies in L.A. must be able to compete with similar facilities down the street; in Portland, there is no such competition.

This is not to say that there are no options for clothing production in town or that boutique owners are not trying their best to work within their means. Rather, hopes are high for change, and a few select business are blazing trails. Here's a rundown of the current state of garment production in Portland from three very different perspectives.

Small Boutique Owner: Sarah Bibb, Folly



Neighborhood Notes

Sarah Bibb, owner of Folly

Sarah Bibb, owner of NW boutique [Folly](#) and designer of her self-titled line, hopes for a day when her designs can be produced entirely in Portland. Currently, Bibb sews some of the items herself in her store and has the rest made at a small production house in L.A. "As the cost of materials such as cotton rise, I have to keep my bottom line with labor costs or else I have to increase my retail prices." Bibb confesses that the logistics of her current method require much more planning to account for travel time, but, in the end, it is worth it to her in order to keep her prices accessible to her customers. To see faster change for businesses her size, Bibb believes it would take a well-established Portland brand such as Nike or Columbia Sportswear to start manufacturing here. "Big companies design here, but they don't manufacture here. If they did, it would change the landscape and create an industry. The trickle down from the top would make a dramatic change in labor costs and availability of materials."



YOLO
colorhouse

local
COLOR.

92 harmonious colors homegrown
in Portland, OR

find a store >



BODY ELEMENTS
CHIROPRACTIC
CLINIC

DR. MARINA ZARÉ
5231 NE MLK
503-477-6322



Be well. Be healthy.