



Silver Lining Playbook

EUGENE'S FIRST GARMENT PRODUCTION HOUSE OPENS AT 4TH AND LINCOLN
by Alex Notman

Three women sit in the back of The Redoux Parlour surrounded by piles of livestock feed bags, burlap sacks, scissors and sewing machines. Laura Lee Laroux, Grace McNabb and Irma Vega are deep in a product development session. Brainstorming how these raw materials can be transformed into popular products in the Eugene market, they pitch ideas like growler bags and grocery totes. Laroux creases the flap of a messenger-style pack made from the crinkly plastic of a Haystack Farm & Feed bag and throws the strap over her shoulder. The seams of the prototype, she points out to Vega, need tweaking and the straps should be longer. Otherwise, the trio appears happy with the bag — one of the first products of the Silver Lining Production House.

In the winter of 2012, *EW* reported on the growing need for a garment-manufacturing factory in Eugene (“Fashioning An Industry,” Dec. 6). With dozens of homegrown apparel and accessories designers in town but no local production house, the small industry was stagnating. Designers faced a problem: Product demand had exceeded what they could do with their own two hands but was not large enough to warrant contracting with a manufacturer overseas or in the remaining, however small, apparel production hubs of New York City or Los Angeles, which usually require orders starting in the thousands. According to an October article in *IndustryWeek*, the U.S. has lost 90 percent of apparel manufacturing jobs in the past two decades.

At that point, an indie apparel house, like the ones that have popped up in Portland in the past five years, was a

long long-term aspiration. Less than 18 months later, however, that goal has been achieved. With local designer and entrepreneur Laroux at the helm, this unique group of women — a sort of perfect sartorial storm — opens Silver Lining Production House this month in the historic Lincoln Street Building at 4th and Lincoln. All it took was the right plan, the right team, the right space and a hell of a lot of elbow grease.

Strategy Style

“It’s about really helping designers get to what their next level is. A lot of the time, it’s starting in the production process,” says McNabb, who has been in partnership and product development meetings with Laroux and Vega for the past six months.

The production house is currently in the negotiation stage with five different regional clients. But more than sewing and manufacturing clothing for independent designers’ collections, Silver Lining will eventually be a multi-function fashion house. The founders plan to help designers with online sales, product photography, branding, sourcing materials and navigating trade and runway shows. As they contract with more clients, they will hire more production sewers and, further down the road, start a graphics department.

In a nutshell, they want to cultivate small fashion businesses. They hope these values come across in their union-inspired logo, which is currently in the design process.

“It symbolizes fair and equal work practices, which is one of the reasons we’re really doing this,” Laroux says.

“Made in America,” McNabb chimes in.

“I would love for our logo to basically say to people, ‘Trust in us. We’re going to care for your brand and your line as you care for your own and try to nurture the growth of it.’” Laroux continues, “A lot of our mission is to bump everything up to that next professional level in a way that allows the community and the country and the world to see what we’re doing here as legit and real and powerful and creative, and not just brush it to the side as some subgenre of hippie tie-dye clothes coming from Eugene.”

A year from now, they hope to see at least one client success story, with an independent designer’s clothing line manufactured, branded and selling in stores.

Common Threads

A Maryland native, Laura Lee Laroux studied design at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City at the turn of the 21st century. While going to school, she worked for a New York designer. “I would take out the trash and see so much fabric thrown away,” Laroux remembers. Those years in NYC ignited her lifelong passion for homegrown, sustainable fashion. After school, she came to Eugene via New Orleans, where she helped run a post-Katrina relief kitchen, making clothes from donated fabric and hand-me-downs on a donated sewing machine.

After settling in Eugene, Laroux worked at Infinity Mercantile, which she eventually bought with a partner and renamed The Redoux Parlour, a clothing store that sells local designs as well as secondhand apparel. The Redoux Parlour, which is currently transferring to its new