

# Entrepreneur Finds Demand for East Coast Fashions

## Itchy Palms boutique shakes up local scene

BY SARAH BLOUNT  
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Paula Carrasco wields the double-edged sword of business savvy and fashion savoir-faire with her family-owned hip-hop clothing boutique, Itchy Palms Urban Apparel, at 1030 N. Lombard.

That is to say, she knows the right men's and women's clothing, shoes and accessories to attract a crowd looking for the latest hip hop styles. And in the likely case you were wondering where the name Itchy Palms originated – Carrasco explains that it means money is coming your way.

"If you put in a lot of hard work and dedication, you'll see a return," she said about her success in the retail business. "That's the way I like to interpret it."

Carrasco is the 28-year-old daughter of Chilean natives, who emigrated from Santiago to Oregon when she was eight, to pursue better opportunities.

Her father, always the enterpriser, ran a janitorial business before arriving in the United States, and has had a string of businesses since. Itchy Palms is Carrasco's first family business endeavor, but she has built a cache of expertise through a double degree in Business and Spanish from the University of Oregon, and several years spent in the ranks of Portland mortgage companies.

Seeking the chance to learn something a little less routine, her parents approached her with an entrepreneurial idea.

Saying she would support her parents in any decision, Carrasco left the mortgage industry after four and a half years to pursue the world of retail.

Carrasco wanted to market something that was harder to come by in Portland – hot East Coast labels like Roca Wear, Marithé + François Girbaud, Sean Jean, Akademiks and LRG.

You can find versions of this style in shops like d.e.m.o. in the Lloyd Center, but Carrasco delivers the specialized selection one can only get from scouring fashion conventions and trade shows, with a keen eye on what will be a hot sell, and



PHOTOS BY SARAH BLOUNT/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER  
Paula Carrasco has found success attracting the hip hop crowd to her Itchy Palms Urban Apparel store at 1030 N. Lombard St.



A sexy denim top with jeans is apparel that sells at Itchy Palms Urban Apparel, a shop located in the small retail center on North Lombard adjacent to the I-5 freeway east-bound off-ramp.

what could potentially bomb.

Carrasco does all her shopping at these events, held every few months in Las Vegas and other major cities.

"It's definitely a challenge when you're buying clothes in bulk," she said. "I'm a very fashion forward person, but as a buyer you have to cater to all markets. Maybe I think it's and everyone agrees, but that doesn't mean it will sell."

So she spends a significant time researching.

The leaves have barely begun to turn but Carrasco's thoughts are already on spring. Even so, her shoppers have their eye on fall fashion.

"Track jackets are hot for fall," she said. "Gold is hot for guys, but girls are more difficult. They like a lot of denim and one-piece suits."

Her personal favorite style personifies her ardent eye and efficient business sense:

"I stick to a sexy top or jeans, then dress it up with accessories," she said. "I can pretty much make an outfit out of anything."



Popular urban designs fill the retail racks at Itchy Palms.

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