



It's All in the Details

How Jennifer Hack Swanson, Marketing: Fashion and Related Industries '91, turns Kobi Halperin's sketches into elegant, wearable clothes

In December, Jennifer Swanson was at a factory in China reviewing the Israeli designer Kobi Halperin's spring 2016 collection. Swanson fit each garment on the company's custom dress form, ensuring that embellishments, lace trims, and layers of silk draped properly. She noticed that the side seams of one jet-black pleated skirt looked unflattering. There wasn't time to ship additional samples to New York, so on the spot, Swanson improvised a different pleating method. "It's a lot of pressure when you're on the other side of the world, making decisions that will affect thousands of garments," she says.

As vice president of product development and production for Kobi Halperin, Swanson is used to making such decisions swiftly. And Halperin trusts her judgment: they began working together over a decade ago at Elie Tahari, where Halperin was executive creative director.

Halperin's label, known for its intricate, feminine details and an evening-wear sensibility, ships four collections a year, featuring silk georgette blouses, wrap dresses, and exclusive prints and lace, at prices ranging from \$198 to \$2,500.

The line first hit high-end department stores, including Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue, in August 2015. It was the most successful

sportswear launch in Bloomingdale's history. This year, the collection is being shipped to 90 locations, including 24 specialty stores.

At the company's office and showroom on Seventh Avenue, Swanson is constantly inspecting samples from boutique factories—small producers of luxury goods—in China, India, Vietnam, and Peru; supervising live model fittings; and translating Halperin's sketches into not only soft leathers and grosgrain trims, but also dollars and cents. If a



Top: Favorites from Kobi Halperin's pre-fall 2016 collection. Above: Halperin and Swanson (wearing the best-selling London blouse) in the company's Garment District showroom.

garment costs too much to produce, she finds the source of the overage and comes up with a creative way to fix it. That might mean asking for a volume discount, finding efficiencies in the production line, or switching out an expensive trim. "In the retail market today, there is a price cap," she says. "You can't ask the consumer to pay an exorbitant price just because it costs that much to make it."

Striking a balance between beauty and profit can be a delicate art. During a fitting in February, Swanson, Halperin, and their team were reviewing an expensive bias-cut dress from the pre-fall 2016 collection (above, second from left). The faux-wrap silk dress had multiple layers that gathered in a tie at the high waist, with a French seam inside. "We want customers to appreciate details inside and outside the garment," Swanson explains, and a French seam usually creates a more tailored, elegant look. But in this case, the seam was causing the silk to pucker. Swanson switched to an overlock stitch—which looked better and happened to be less expensive.

Ultimately, Swanson's acumen and persistence result in beautiful, high-quality pieces that make women—including herself—feel good.

"What I love most about our product," she says, "is that when you walk in the room, people ask, 'Where did you get that?'" —Katharine Reece