

ON CLOUD NINE

Doll up all you want with Nine West's designer spin on accessories

BY JYOTI PESWANI

Let's face it: the pressure to be fabulous is always on the rise. And as much as we love Jimmy Choo and Manolo Blahnik, sometimes we do crave affordable chic, eBay or no eBay! Since telling a woman that a pair of shoes or a chic must-have handbag is too expensive is sacrilege, isn't it great when you can find designer name and an affordable price tag? This fall, our prayers have been answered by designer divinities like Vivienne Westwood, Sophia Kokosalaki and Thakoon, courtesy Nine West. The collaboration was

christened Project Front Row and each of these three designers was given the challenge to design shoes, handbags and accessories for this limited-edition, luxury collection.

These exclusive lines make high-end designer fashion accessible without the guilt. The designers were given full creative control over their collection, each of which is comprised of eleven pieces including shoes, handbags and ready-to-wear accessories. Only a precious 2000 copies of each collection have been produced. What's interesting



about this collaboration is the diverse styles these designers have. Westwood is classic; Thakoon has a warm and decorative style, Kokosalaki's designs are sculptural and futuristic. For this project, Westwood and Kokosalaki strayed away from their usual: the former from her sky-high platforms and the latter from her Grecian draping.

Nine West hand-picked these designers so that they could put a unique and yet mass-market take on their creations.

Legendary English designer Dame Vivienne Westwood DBE, whom we know simply as Vivienne Westwood, the British fashion icon, is one of the world's most influential designers. She was largely responsible for modern punk and new wave fashions that began in 1970s London. Her controversial designs - which included bondage gear fused with more traditional British fabrics like tartans - came to the forefront of fashion during that time.

Watch out for tartan in Westwood's Nine West line, too. Westwood believes that couture shouldn't have to be a celebrity thing any more. "Many American celebrities wear Vivienne Westwood clothes," she explains. "And while the name is well-known in the States, few American women have had access to the clothes or accessories. Teaming up with Nine West gives the opportunity to many more American women to discover what it feels like to wear Vivienne Westwood."

Thakoon's feminine designs for the exclusive Nine West collection combine classical romanticism with modern innovation. A former editor of Harper's Bazaar, his most recent collection reflects a baroque futurism with a romanticized spirit. In 2004, Thakoon produced his first ready-to-wear collection and has quickly become a favorite in the fashion world, dazzling fashion editors, critics and celebrities alike. Commenting on the collaboration, Thakoon said, "For me, the collaboration with Nine West is about design within reach. In



a super-saturated and noisy market, it is a great opportunity for a young designer like myself to be heard."

Greek-born Sophia Kokosalaki's inventive use of textiles and leathers are evident in her exclusive line for Nine West. One of London's rising stars in fashion, her Grecian-inspired designs are a refined blend of the poetic and the contemporary. Her Fall 2006 ready-to-wear runway show in Paris confirmed her status as an independent designer with a voice of her own. In 2004, she was asked to create the opening and closing ceremony outfits for the Summer Olympic Games in

Athens.

Kokosalaki is thrilled with the alliance with Nine West. "Collaborating with Nine West is very exciting," she says, "as they have a vast wealth of expertise and knowledge, and very high production quality regarding accessories. They also respect the design process and try to remain true to the vision of designers. This, coupled with their enthusiasm to achieve the right product and level of quality, will make the results very desirable."

Westwood's collection will be up for grabs in September, Thakoon's in October and Kokosalaki's in November. And mind you, their collections will be available just for that month only.

From the Nine West perspective, this is one way to be out of the ordinary. The good news: you get to own a pair of designer originals without the hefty price tag. In some way, isn't that what style is all about? What matters is not whether heads will turn, but that you feel like a million bucks. Chances are, designer shoes will only add to that charisma.

Nine West has partnered with Macy's for these lines and they will be available exclusively at the top 40 Macy's doors and the top 20 Nine West retail stores. The lines will also be available online at www.ninewest.com and www.macys.com. **VIP**