

ALOHA SPIRIT & HOLLYWOOD STYLE

step on the runway with swimsuit designer **shay todd**

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For L.A.-based designer Shay Todd, creating fashion-forward beach and resort wear is not just another day at the office. "I just play Barbies, really," says the in-demand designer, whose creative playtime is turning her into a household name, at least in the fashion world. "It's almost a hobby I do, and it's a business at the same time."

As it turns out, Shay's hobby has earned her swimwear queen status among Hollywood style-makers. Hollywood elites such as Lindsay Lohan and Carmen Electra are reportedly fans of Shay Todd. Eva Longoria donned a sexy ruffled one piece onstage at last year's MTV Music Awards. And, of course, there's the infamous Carl's Jr. TV. ad, with Paris Hilton in a slinky black number, sudsing a Bentley and chowing down a greasy burger.

Why so much love from the Hollywood A-list? It's likely because Shay's designs combine runway-inspired couture with beach-ready function. They're super-sexy, and they demand attention. "I think that I found something different that's eye-catching and that celebrities gravitate toward to make statements, whether it be for the MTV Music Awards or Paris Hilton, who would wear nothing else but statement-grabbing suits," says the seamstress.

But even fashion-loving non-celebrities want to look good on the beach or poolside. "I found a niche that wasn't so tapped into yet in terms of combining the lounge swimwear versus the sporty swimwear where some of the suits may not actually be worn for swimming," she laughs.

Shay, who grew up in Hawai'i and was always in a swimsuit, says her fascination with beachwear started early. "I've always been obsessed with fashion. Ever since I was a little girl, it was always just a complete passion, an obsession for me," she admits. A true fashion aficionado, she has encyclopedic knowledge of other designers' work. "I can pick out a piece and tell you from what collection of what season of what year."

Although she never attended design school, eventually her knowledge of fashion and need for swimwear combined, and five years ago her first collection was born. The hardest part for Shay was learning the ins and outs of manufacturing, but she's managed to combine her creativity with newfound business know-how. "I tried to start really small so my mistakes would be small," she says.

Today, she and her husband Shiro work in West Hollywood where they have offices, a workspace, and a retail showroom for appointment-only personal clients. Unlike many clothing lines today, the Shay Todd line is manufactured entirely in downtown Los Angeles where she can keep a close eye on the finished product, ensuring the fit and detailing is just right.

The Spring 2006 collection is island-inspired, but not with the bold floral prints that usually defines Hawai'ian style. Shay went for an organic feel, using light pastels like mint, peach and baby yellow, as well as grass green, and accented with earth-toned or opalescent beads. The result is

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something "a little more earthy and a little more Hawai'i-inspired." Shay's favorite suit this year is a ruffled mocha-hued two-tier bikini. "I love that bikini. I took it with me on my recent holiday and tried it out," she says.

Hawai'i isn't Shay's only muse. "Traveling inspires me," says Shay, who cites Tokyo as one of her favorite cities. "Old films, today's trends, a color palette. Anything and everything.

I can start from a simple piece of hardware and that will transpire into a million different ideas and even a whole direction for an entire collection."

The Shay Todd line is becoming more than just swimwear; it's an entire lifestyle brand suited for every aspect of a beach vacation, from the plane to the sand, to a casual dinner. "All inclusive—that's the concept of the line. If you're going on vacation, you could pack a suit from beginning to end with a theme in mind," says the designer. High end terry cloth—the "cashmere of terry" Shay calls it—gives her loungewear comfort and stretch, but looks tailored and chic at the same time.

When it comes down to it, Shay Todd's love for the beach, not fame or celebrity, is what makes her business a success. "For me, personally, it's what I come from. It's home," says the Honolulu native. "The feeling of the sand, the sound of the ocean... All of that is childhood for me, more than just a vacation or a suntan. It's a moment to get to the roots. It's definitely my element." ●

