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## Design Knit Launches Studio DK in Its Latest Initiative to 'Give Back'

How best to give back to the industry that has been your lifeblood?

This is the question that has preoccupied mother and daughter Shala and Pat Tabassi and their dedicated staff at Design Knit Inc., the family-owned knitting mill CEO Shala built from the ground up beginning in 1986. Widely acknowledged as a premier purveyor of high-quality knit fabrics for the contemporary, athleisure, sportswear, and loungewear markets, Design Knit, almost from the start, has been focused on giving back to the fashion community as much as it has endeavored to build its business.

In particular, the Tabassis, who run one of the rare local mills in the city, have concentrated on students and young designers, whom they regard as the industry's future. "We have long supported the next generations of designers," says Pat, who serves as head of product development and community outreach. "That's really important to us beyond the business end."

Design Knit more than a decade ago began offering to students scholarships and mentorship internships as well as regular factory and showroom tours. Pat, a frequent lecturer at the various fashion schools in Los Angeles, got the idea from an experience she had when she happened to sit in on a textile class. "Textile-oriented classes can be incredibly technical," she says. "I realized we needed to get them over to our facilities to see how it all worked, show them firsthand knit-fabric production." Students who have a better understanding of how a fabric is made, the Tabassis believed, will have more success in employing those fabrics in their designs.

Over the years, this highly successful outreach illuminated for the Tabassis a big issue for those starting out and "identified a void that wasn't being filled," Pat explains. Up-and-coming designers with a need for high-quality fabrics were often stymied by the high minimum orders required at the better mills, including Design Knit itself. "We'll meet really talented designers or students ready to graduate," Pat relates, "and they have to go to closeouts only and can't always repurchase the same fabrics, so there's a lack of consistency in their product."

Could there be a way, they wondered, to offer their high-quality goods at lower minimums? Studio DK is Design Knit's answer to the challenge. When it opens in mid-July, Studio DK will offer a curated collection of about 300 fabrics, both yarn-dyed and prepared-for-garment-dye, hand-picked by the staff from the thousands in Design Knit's stable. These fabrics, which include a large number of novelty fabrics and new styles added seasonally in different weights as appropriate, will be offered at a "significant reduction" in the minimum and faster turnaround time for a nominal surcharge. Timing depends on the availability of yarn and machine space, but an order that normally would take four to six weeks can be turned around in as little as three to four weeks.

Studio DK also will carry a steady in-house stock of ten of Design Knit's bestselling fabrics, all prepared-for-garment-dye, also available at a low minimum for immediate use. The fabrics—"a good range, a good variety," Pat notes—include jerseys, French terry, rib, thermal, and jersey spandex, including fine-quality Buhler yarns and TENCEL™ fibers. "These are products we've seen do really well for us," she explains. "To have ten core styles available is a wonderful benefit."

Also among the Studio DK offerings will be fabrics made with sustainable fibers

and recycled yarns plus a collection fabricated from discontinued yarns. In an effort to reduce waste, fabric overages will also be available for purchase "with the hopes of giving the products a second life," Pat says.

While located at the same mill facility as Design Knit, Studio DK has a separate entrance, parking lot, and newly constructed showroom—a tranquil place awash in neutrals. There will be garment-dyed samples to inspire and a yarn-dye color card. And while the assortment is a "honed-down collection from our line," Pat explains, "we are still able to tweak some of these fabrications as well."

The advantages of Studio DK can work in many scenarios. "They are working with shorter lead times, and I will get a lot of inquiries for quick response," says

Sarvey Tahmasebi Rector, director of sales and marketing. "This is a great way for them to produce goods in a fast way. If they can get samples done quickly and show them closer to lead time, it's definitely good for a quick-response program."

For all intents and purposes, Studio DK is a separate entity from Design Knit, which continues its business unchanged. "We are evolving and adding to our business," she points out. "Design Knit is very strong; we just want to cater to a different area of the market."

What Studio DK and Design Knit will share is their near-obsessive attention to customer service and building strong relationships that withstand the ebb and flow of industry demands. "It's the ambience, and the way we treat people," Pat says. "The new showroom is a reflection of that. It's cheery and a space people will really enjoy."

Visits to Studio DK will be by appointment only, and appointments are being taken now prior to the grand opening. The Design Knit website includes a drop-down for Studio DK, where requests for appointments can be submitted there. The ideal client is a new label ready to go. "You want to start with a company and grow with them," Pat says, which has worked so well for the Design Knit parent.

For Shala Tabassi, who cannot say enough about her dedicated staff and their collaborative and supportive spirit, this new chapter has her "looking forward to seeing so many of the new designers who come here and see what we have and help their future."

Pat echoes the feeling. "We hope we're able to service this side of the business that feels they are low on options," she says. "We look forward to helping our industry thrive."

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