

Bal Harbour

MAGAZINE





LIVING BY DESIGN

Designer Elie Tahari's appreciation of art and architecture is ever-present in all aspects of his acclaimed fashions.

BY KRISTINA STEWART WARD

Design connoisseurs will feel very much at home in Elie Tahari's new 2,300 square foot temple to fashion, art, furniture and architecture in Bal Harbour. "Great architects create spaces that are very much in tune with the wind, sun, light, air and the seasons," says Elie Tahari, the company's founder and CEO. "Clothing should be no different." His commitment to this audience is obvious upon entering the Bal Harbour store, which opened in November. The first thing you notice is the light, which has been artfully manipulated via a sheer ceiling, creating a skylight affect. Mid-century classics such as a Noguchi coffee table, and Venini chandeliers are complemented by Pierro Lissoni's floor-to-ceiling glass façade and art purchased by Elie and his wife Rory at Miami's Art Basel. He once owned a hotel in South Beach and indeed reveals that his spring collection takes its cues from Florida's urbane tropical aesthetic. Diaphanous gowns in vivid patterns of flora and fauna as well as exotic animal prints are core to the metropolitan jungle theme.

Another source of inspiration for the designer has often been architecture. In addition to purchasing the Christian Liagra-designed SoHo triplex from Rupert Murdoch for his family's city home, Elie also owns the landmark building at 510 Fifth Avenue, designed by Gordon Bunshaft. Built in 1954, the five-floor masterpiece was constructed "more as a piece of jewelry than a building" according to the architect himself, and its current owner appreciates it as such. Elie's latest accessories collection uses the steel-



The designer, Elie Tahari.



His new boutique in Bal Harbour.

INSPIRATIONS



The copper nickel and brass sculpture by Harry Bertioia that spans the second floor of the Tahari Fifth Avenue building.

Tahari's house in the Hamptons.



The 510 bag inspired by the Harry Bertioia sculpture.



From the Elie Tahari ad campaign photographed by Terry Richardson.



Elie and his wife Rory, backed by an Erwin Hauer sculpture in his New York design headquarters.

encased glass building as its inspiration, and 510 Fifth houses the Tahari showroom and design atelier. "Those massive glass panes were, at the time, the largest ever installed," he says. "I can't imagine anyone being able to create a more modern building, even today."

Tahari's longtime architect Piero Lissoni also draws inspiration from the legendary edifice, both in the flagship stores he creates for Tahari, and for the corporate offices which are housed around the corner from the Bunshaft building. A dramatically pared-down space, the offices reflect Elie's sophisticated taste in art and design. In the hall leading to his office, he has hung a series of early photographs of the famed TWA terminal built by Eero Saarinen; in his office are Eames leather chairs and photographs by Nan Goldin; a David LaChapelle photograph hangs in the adjacent office belonging to his wife of nine years, Rory, who serves as the company's creative director.

"I'm lucky to have Rory working with me," says Elie. "She is my ideal customer, but more than that, she's also full of ideas of how to present and expand the collections." It was Rory who brought on board the famed and controversial photographer Terry Richardson to shoot the Tahari ad campaigns. While his bad-boy reputation stems from such work as sexually-charged ads for Gucci, Mui Mui and Vogue editorials, his photographs for Tahari hit the perfect pitch of edgy and accessible. "He's uniquely capable of capturing the essence of our clothes," says Rory, who has stopped by Elie's office to ask him a question. A striking beauty with long dark hair, the mother of two does much to promote the Tahari brand on a human level, being as glamorous as the current season's floor-length floral silk gown, and as no-nonsense as the perfectly-fitted well-priced pair of classic pants. A recent article on the couple in Harper's Bazaar featured Rory in the kitchen wearing a Dior ball gown. She is holding a mixing bowl while surrounded by her children. She laughs it off as being far from the reality of how she makes cookies. The couple met

at Elie's birthday party where he asked to have a photo taken with her. When she asked why he wanted it, he said confidently, "I'd like a photograph of my future wife." Two years later he had both the photo and his new bride.

If it seems a story too good to be true, Elie's own story is even more impressive. Raised in an orphanage in Israel, he moved to New York in the '70s with only a few dollars to his name. Working as an electrician by day, he moonlighted at a retail store that kept

late hours. More importantly, he also moonlighted at the nightclubs around town and quickly picked up on what women wore, and what looked good on them. Gloria Steinem and the women's movement had just advised women to burn their bras, and new styles were emerging to accommodate this newly emancipated female. Elie began consulting the store owner on trends to buy for the shop, and was before long, designing clothes to fill the niche. He gained early recognition for the tube tops he designed entirely of elastic (for better hold on the disco dance floors.) Sure enough, most photographs from the heyday of Studio 54 reflect women wearing Elie's signature spandex tube tops as well as the handkerchief-hem dresses he produced. His first fashion show took place at Studio 54 in its opening month, and of course, both the nightclub and Elie Tahari would go on to make significant names for themselves. In the case of the latter, Tahari is now a \$500 million company with a global presence and Elie is recognized as creating the best fit in the industry. "A good fit is something that works on several body types, so I use staff members to help me understand the different incarnations of a particular size." In addition to using forgiving fabrics, Elie adds, "it's very much in the cut, in the architecture of the garment." So it appears that a keen understanding and appreciation for architecture weaves itself into all aspects of Tahari, from the sun-drenched sartorial sanctuaries he creates to house his collections, to the perfectly cut pair of pants with which we fashionably walk out the front door.