

# People: Debi Greenberg

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Here, we speak with her about her new store on the harbor, why she hates chit chat, and what's wrong with the menswear business.



**How would you describe yourself to someone who doesn't know you?** When people first meet me, they understand immediately where I'm coming from. I am very direct when I speak my mind. Since my daughter was born 20 years ago "time" is/was this precious commodity, so I don't like to waste it with chit chat. I love to engage people in talk as long as the exchange is lively and informative.

**What is your personal style?** Eclectic: I like design that is modern and forward thinking without too much fashion clutter. There has to be a balance in the way things are put together: luxury juxtaposed with utilitarian.

**What is your vision/mission statement for the store?** My mission statement is simple (as all mission statements should be): To introduce and offer our customer truly well-made, elegantly designed modern clothing in a setting that mirrors the clothes. This requires personal service that only well-trained consultants can provide. I think my store represents a lifestyle that young (or young-thinking) active, entrepreneurial customers can relate to. Though we always concentrate on high-quality goods, the setting, right on the water, is the essence of the store design. The store itself has high ceilings (luxurious), cement floors (utilitarian), Italian furnishings (luxurious) exposed ceilings (utilitarian). The atmosphere is warm, friendly and very professional; customers enjoy

their time with us and tend to make a day of it (we have a salon, restaurant and bar).

**How's your men's business? What's needed to make it better?** In general, menwear business has been in a downward spiral for 20 years, ever since Generation X wanted to dress down. Men always wanted to be comfortable but Gen X fashion eliminated the need to present oneself professionally. Every generation puts its stamp on its attire, and with every generational change comes a push back: traditional men's stores resisted casual, fighting the fight, but they were fighting an uphill battle and the weapons ended up being price discounts. The recession came and seemed to stop the spiral, forcing men to look at themselves and how they were dressing in a more professional light.

In the meantime, vendors created fashion more in tune with the new male customer. But I don't think retailers get it: they've trained the customer not to look for new and better but to accept the same old-same old, only at a discount. And now with online shopping, the customer doesn't even have to leave his house! What have we done as retailers to entice him back to the store, to show him the fashion advances the industry has made?

Fortunately, my business comprises customers who understand the new nuances relevant to men's clothing. They appreciate how far we've come in fabrications and tailoring. They look forward to

discovering different ways to wear clothes without looking too self-conscious. Fortunately, our trend is upward and we're seeing new men walk through the door each day. But it's been hard work: one by one, customer by customer. We're also focused on keeping our inventories tight so that the idea of waiting 'til an item goes on sale (which we never did) is out of the question. Our merchandise doesn't depreciate within weeks.



pants as there are in soft jackets.

**What role does price play in this business?** Interestingly, in the luxury market, price is not the key driver. If you show something special that is not available everywhere, the customer jumps at the chance to own it. This I have seen time and time again.

**How can we as an industry get men to dress better?** The industry as a whole has done a terrible job of communicating to its customer. Marketing to a man the same way you do to a woman is completely wrong. They are not the same creatures. Men's magazines in London do an amazing job of communicating to men in a formula that is both affable and informative at the same time. Here, we tend to write a how-to catalog for dummies or a fashion bible that men can't relate to. This generation isn't as aspirational as the previous, so showing images of people playing polo doesn't work anymore.

**What's the best advice you ever received from your father?** The best advice my father gave me (and I got a lot of great advice) is stay firm and don't depreciate your merchandise because once you do, you can never go back. The most important customer is the one who pays full retail. Make sure he never feels like a fool seeing markdowns on merchandise for which he paid full price. If the merchandise is worthy of the ticket price, it should not be marked down.

**What might you be doing if not this?** I was in marketing for 15 years before I came into the family business. I would return to marketing, especially today where companies think that marketing is a science, not an art.

**Your biggest buying mistake?** Short sleeved sweaters for men. I thought that if they were always hot, they'd like them....

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**What would you like to see more of/less of in the market?** I think pants, a category that is frequently shopped, have become too predictable. I wish there were as many choices in the design, cut and fabrics of

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